

Estonia: History of Occupation, the Path to Independence, and the Estonian Identity

-An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Brianna Lisak and Anna Wiegand

**Thesis Advisor
Sergei Zhuk**

Signed

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

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Abstract

Eastern Europe provides an interesting case study for the effects of life under occupation and how peoples and societies may recover from such traumatic histories.. Recently, the lasting effects of Soviet occupation have once again been brought to the forefront, especially in Ukraine and in world relations with Russia more generally. One area that seems often forgotten is the Baltics. Estonia, specifically, has a unique history of overlapping occupation, resistance, and independence that offers a fascinating perspective and insight for those who take the time to understand it. In Part I of this joint thesis, Brianna Lisak explores life in Estonia under its multitude of occupations, and more significantly, life under Soviet occupation. Section I will give a brief look at the history of Estonia and its first occupations, prior to the 20th century. Section II will explore Estonia and Europe in the first half of the 20th century, discussing Estonia's experience during the Russian Revolutions, the World Wars, and how, ultimately, it came to be under more permanent Soviet control. Section III will explore life in Soviet Estonia until roughly 1980. In Part II of the joint thesis, Anna Wiegand explores life in Estonia from the independence movement to the present. Section I discusses the measures that the Estonians took to gain independence from the Soviet Union. Section II examines the challenges the country faced during its political, economic, and social transitions. Section III explores Estonia's attempts to preserve its culture and form an independent national identity. Though Estonia's history of occupation still affects the country today, in many ways, its recovery has been a remarkable success.

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ESTONIA: HISTORY OF OCCUPATION, THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE, AND THE
ESTONIAN IDENTITY
THESIS 1: HISTORY OF OCCUPATION

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ESTONIA AND OCCUPATION PRIOR TO THE 20TH CENTURY

The oldest archeological evidence suggests that the humans were present in what is now Estonia as early as 9000 B.C.¹ The first human settlements, of a people known as the Kunda, date back to 7500 B.C.² Between 4000-2000 B.C., new groups of people immigrated to the area, and evidence of their arrival can be seen in changes in pottery styles.³ Around 3000 B.C., agriculture began to develop in Estonia.⁴ According to Rein Taagepera in his book *Estonia: Return to Independence*, the Estonian language, “can be traced back perhaps 5,000 years” in the area that is now Estonia, so it must have developed around this time as well.⁵ Between 1800 B.C. and 450 A.D., Estonia developed a system of land ownership, small farming flourished, and the economy grew as Estonian tribes began to trade with each other and with other peoples.⁶ According to the official website of Estonia, between 600 and 800 C.E., “traditional Estonian villages and village society formed. Many villages established in this era are still inhabited today.”⁷ By 1000 C.E., Estonia became an important stop on Viking trade routes, and the Estonian economy became comparable to its Central European counterparts.⁸ From this time until the early 1200s, Estonia’s governmental and political structure solidified, with the

¹ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 11.

³ See note 1 above.

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 13.

⁶ See note 1 above.

⁷ See note 1 above.

⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 14.

introduction of an Estonian military and the administrative units within the country that still exist today.⁹

Prior to 1200, the Estonians were able to “hold their own”¹⁰ and remain independent. At the turn of the century, however, German crusaders invaded the Baltics, and while the inhabitants of Latvia were quickly subdued, Estonians resisted from 1208 to 1227.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Danes invaded from the north in 1219, and the Swedes invaded from the east in 1220. The purpose of these attacks was to convert Estonians to Christianity. Some research suggests, however, that Estonians were already experiencing a gradual, peaceful transition to Christianity prior to these crusades, but this had little effect on how the Estonians were treated by the invading forces. The separate invaders often competed in their Christianization of the region. For example, if a community elder had converted and been baptized by the Germans, upon the arrival of the Danes, he may be killed for having done so.¹² The Estonians finally succumbed to German occupation in 1227, and this occupation would last until 1561.¹³ The Danes and Swedes would claim parts of Estonia for themselves as well.¹⁴ In their history of consecutive and overlapping occupations, Estonians would find themselves in difficult positions, like this one,

⁹ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁰ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹² See note 11 above.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁴ See note 9 above.

throughout the centuries. As Rein Taagepera describes, “By 1200, Estonians...acquired an unenviable geopolitical and geodemographic position that has bedeviled them ever since.”¹⁵

From 1343-1345, Estonians rose up in rebellion against their foreign rulers.¹⁶ While the uprising was eventually crushed, the Estonians did succeed in destroying Danish control of some parts of northern Estonia. One unfortunate result, however, was that many Estonians who still held power throughout the country were now replaced by Central or Northern Europeans.¹⁷ The Germans also began to gain more control over the Estonian populace. They implemented a system of feudalism in which Germans made up the majority of estate owners, and Estonians made up the large majority of the peasants now forced to work the land.¹⁸ Estonians were rarely able to escape their serfdom, as their language would give them away if they tried to hide their ethnicity.¹⁹

In the early 1500s, the Reformation began in Estonia, and Lutheranism spread the idea that religion should be taught in a language that the people could understand.²⁰ As a result of these ideas, the first “Estonian-language book”²¹ was printed in 1535. While this event represented a victory for the Estonians, their difficulties with foreign powers were far from over.

¹⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 18.

¹⁶ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁷ See note 15 above.

¹⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ See note 16 above.

The Germans were gradually losing control over the region.²² As a result of the Russian-Livonian War from 1558 to 1563, the Swedes took control of northern Estonia, and Poland took control of southern Estonia.²³ Rein Taagepera discusses just how complex and confusing the rule of Estonia was during the time, writing that, "Parts of Estonia were seized by Swedes, Poles, Danes, a Danish duke manipulated by Russians, Russians directly, and Estonian peasant insurgents."²⁴ As a result of the Swedish-Polish Wars from 1600 to 1627, the Swedes took control of southern Estonia as well, and by 1645, Estonia was occupied by a single country: Sweden.²⁵ This complicated time in Estonia's history was particularly destructive. According to Rein Taagepera, "Of the prewar population of some 250,000 [Estonians], only 100,000 had survived the war, famine, and plague. Although the Germans had lost sovereign political power, they remained the socioeconomic ruling class, and their power over the Estonian peasants even continued to increase."²⁶ In fact, after the Estonian rebellion in the mid-14th century, Estonians were not mentioned in the surviving documents of the time. Rein Taagepera describes how Estonians in these centuries "vanished" and "no longer existed"²⁷ in their own country.

Life under Swedish control is said to have somewhat better than life under German rule. In collective Estonian memory, the period under Swedish control was known as the "Happy

²² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁴ See note 23 above.

²⁵ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

²⁶ See note 23 above.

²⁷ See note 23 above.

Swedish Time.”²⁸ Throughout the rule of the Swedes (1561-1710), peasants’ rights became a topic of discussion, but in reality, the power of the Swedish nobles increased.²⁹ While the destruction of the wars that led up to total Swedish rule left many of the farms in Estonia ownerless, they were usually given to Swedish nobles.³⁰ As a result, most Estonians were still peasants throughout the time of Swedish rule. Even upon the formation of Tartu University in 1632, the first university in Estonia, no Estonians attended.³¹ At the end of the 17th century, the Russians began to pose a threat to Swedish power. The two countries engaged in the Great Northern War, which lasted from 1700 to 1721.³² The Swedes were defeated, and the Russians gradually took Estonia. The Treaty of Nystad of 1721 officially absorbed Estonia into the Russian Empire.³³ As with many of the political transitions in Estonian history, the Russian takeover was brutal for the Estonian people. Rein Taagepera describes the transition, writing that “the usual plunder and murder were aggravated by a systematic scorched-earth policy ordered by the Russian tsar.”³⁴ The Russian takeover was especially bad for the wealthy citizens of Tartu, who were deported to Russia. These events, with their unfortunate foreshadowing of future relations with Russia, inspired the first known Estonian-language poem, by Käsü Hans:

²⁸ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 4.

²⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 23.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ See note 30 above.

³² “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

³³ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 12.

³⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 26.

Then to Russia he did take
all the city folks, by force.
All the masters, mistresses
sorrowfully shed their tears:
Into Russia I will be.
Tartu city, woe to me!³⁵

Russia ruled Estonia for the first (but not last) time from 1710 to 1860. This time period in Estonian history was relatively peaceful, and both the population and the economy recovered from the many years of war that preceded Russian rule.³⁶ While upward mobility was still virtually nonexistent for the Estonian people during the first century of Russian rule, some small strides were made in the formation and dissemination of Estonian culture.³⁷ The first Estonian translation of the Bible was published in 1739.³⁸ Similarly, German composer Gottfried Herder included eight Estonian folk songs in his popular song collection in 1787.³⁹ The first student of Estonian descent attended the University of Tartu in the early 1800s.⁴⁰

From 1816 to 1819, serfdom was abolished in Estonia.⁴¹ While in the long run this allowed for great improvement in the lives of Estonians, originally, it made life worse. Former peasants were given a small plots of land by wealthy estate owners, but in return for the land, the peasants would have to work for the owner whenever he wanted, often leaving their own crops unattended for long periods of time. This period of neo-serfdom caused unrest among the

³⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

³⁹ See note 37 above.

⁴⁰ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 29.

⁴¹ See note 40 above.

Estonians. As time passed, the threat of peasant revolts forced both estate owners and the Russian government to shift towards a money rent system instead of rent in the form of unlimited labor payments.⁴²

New freedoms brought the “birth of Estonian high culture”⁴³ during the second half of the 19th century. This period, known as the “National Awakening,” lasted from 1860-1917.⁴⁴ According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, “The spread of national consciousness was greatly facilitated by the fact that 90% of the rural population were able to read by 1850.”⁴⁵ Estonian literature began to be published, and newspapers, theater, and poetry soon followed.⁴⁶ In 1862, the Estonian national epic, “Kalevipoeg,” was published in Estonian for the first time, and in 1869, “the first national song festival took place in Tartu. In 1884, the present day Estonian flag was created by a students’ society.”⁴⁷ Estonian “cultural nationalism” developed in the sense that they now had their own culture, separate from their Russian rulers.⁴⁸ This separate culture, to Estonians, would one day warrant a separate nation. In fact, the Russians even cracked the door to democracy by requiring town council members to be elected.⁴⁹ In other words, not

⁴² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 30.

⁴³ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁴⁴ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁶ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 31.

⁴⁷ See note 43 above.

⁴⁸ See note 46 above.

⁴⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 33.

only did Estonians develop their culture as a result of the abolition of serfdom, but they were also temporarily given some say in their governance.

Just as the Estonians were able to experience what it meant to be Estonian, the Russians decided to “Russify” Estonia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.⁵⁰ In an attempt to subdue any resistance that may have been growing in Estonia and to lessen the impact of the still powerful Baltic Germans (leftover from previous German rule), the Russians mandated that schoolchildren be taught in Russian, and students that were caught speaking Estonian were to be punished. Despite these attempts to destroy the Estonian identity, Russification in Estonia largely failed, as Estonians were able to adjust themselves while still holding on to their culture at the turn of the century.⁵¹

ESTONIA AND EUROPE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

By 1900, Estonians were able to elect their own people into a new all-Estonian Congress and other leadership positions. The 1905 Russian Revolution began shortly thereafter as a result of discontent with czarist rule throughout the Russian Empire and the disappointing loss of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The goal of this first revolution was to force Czar Nicholas to change the government from an autocracy to a constitutional monarchy. The revolution progressed through general strikes and peaceful demonstrations, as well as student riots and terrorist assassinations.⁵² According to John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, “The revolutionary year

⁵⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 5.

⁵¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

of 1905 revealed the full force of discontent among the peoples of the Baltic lands.”⁵³ The discontent had spread to Estonia and other parts of the empire, fueled also by nationalist desires for independence and an end to the occupation. Czar Nicholas eventually responded by establishing a Duma, or an elected assembly, to work with him to rule the empire. For some revolutionaries in Russia, these concessions were enough, and they went back to work, weakening the revolution’s momentum. For others, especially those in the satellite states, these concessions were not enough.⁵⁴ Estonians demanded autonomy, even creating their own political parties, but instead of compromising with their many satellite states, the Russians decided to impose martial law.⁵⁵ They sent “special military expeditions...to Poland, the Baltic provinces, and Georgia, where the suppression of the rebellions was particularly bloody.”⁵⁶ The first Duma was eventually “choked off” by the czar, as he began to disagree with its policies. It was dissolved in 1906. After the revolution, however, reforms did continue in Estonia. The economy rapidly expanded, urbanization continued, censorship was lifted in 1906, the Estonian-language was allowed in private schools, and “Estonians formed one-sixth of the students at Tartu University.”⁵⁷ In fact, Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera state that, “In spite of setbacks, the general political and cultural relaxation that set in after 1906 allowed for a steady intensification

⁵³ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 21.

⁵⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 36.

⁵⁵ See note 54 above

⁵⁶ The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, “Russian Revolution of 1905,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015. Accessed October 18, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution-of-1905>.

⁵⁷ See note 54 above.

of the national consciousness of the Baltic peoples.”⁵⁸ The Estonian national identity, and therefore, the demand for Estonian autonomy, would only increase.

World War I changed everything in Estonia. In the early 1910s, the Serbs wanted to liberate their fellow Slavs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, leading to the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife in 1914. The empire declared war on Serbia, and the Russian Empire “declared that Austria-Hungary must not be allowed to crush Serbia,” as the Russians also felt a sense of brotherhood with the Slavs of the country.⁵⁹ As Germany was an ally of Austria-Hungary, they declared war on Russia. Due to the incredible entanglement of military alliances, Germany and its allies declared war on Russia, and Russia and its allies declared war in return. World War I was ultimately a struggle between the Central Powers, including Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey, and the Allied Powers, including France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and eventually, the United States.⁶⁰ Estonians tended to side with Russia, as they still considered Germans living in the Baltic States to be oppressors, but it is unclear if Estonians actually wanted to participate in the fighting.⁶¹ According to Rein Taagepera, “About 100,000 (20 percent of Estonian males) were mobilized into the tsarist armed forces, and over 10,000 died. The German army conquered the southwestern half of Latvia in

⁵⁸ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 8.

⁵⁹ The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, “Russian Revolution of 1905,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015. Accessed October 18, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution-of-1905>.

⁶⁰ See note 59 above.

⁶¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 41.

1915 but did not advance further until 1918. Labor and consumer good shortages plus inflation brought increasing dissatisfaction.”⁶²

World War I, and the ensuing revolutions which caused Russia to exit the war, eventually brought an end to the Russian Empire. In February 1917, Czar Nicholas II was removed from power in what became known as the February Revolution, and Estonians increasingly demanded autonomy. In April, they coordinated a major demonstration in Petrograd to protest their continued attachment to the Russian Empire. Frightened and unsure of how to proceed, the provisional Russian government sought to institute democracy, giving Estonia more self-determination.⁶³ Estonians were able to elect a provisional assembly, called the “Maapäev,” to run their “governorate,” which included parts of today’s Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.⁶⁴ In fact, Estonia was the only “national region...granted autonomy” by the provisional government.⁶⁵ Led by V.I. Lenin, the Bolsheviks took power in Russia in November of 1917, initially promising autonomy and peace, which appealed to many of the satellite peoples who did not receive more autonomy. The Estonians, however, were put in a difficult position soon after this Bolshevik Revolution. World War I was still raging on, and the Germans were advancing into Estonia. The Bolsheviks in Estonia led troops to disband the Maapäev, but before they arrived, the legislature quickly declared itself the highest authority in the country.⁶⁶

⁶² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 36-37.

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁶⁵ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

⁶⁶ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 42-43.

Estonians tried to find a way to gain more autonomy, deter the Germans from completely overrunning the country, and get out of the conflict. They worked with the Bolsheviks to negotiate, and they eventually proposed Estonian independence, with the Bolsheviks remaining in power in independent Estonia. The Maapäev refused the proposal.⁶⁷ Soon after, the Germans invaded Estonia in February of 1918.⁶⁸ The underground Maapäev declared independence for their new democratic republic on February 24th in the “Manifest for all the Peoples of Estonia.” While this may appear to be a big step forward for Estonian autonomy, at the time, it had few immediate effects. German troops arrived in Tallinn the next day, dispersed Estonian military forces, and refused to listen to the new Estonian authorities. In fact, some Estonian leaders were executed or sent to German concentration camps.⁶⁹ The Germans planned to annex Estonia and make it part of the German Empire. There was little Estonians could do to keep this plan from being implemented, but luckily the course of history changed the game.

Germany surrendered to the Allies in November 1918, ending the German occupation of Estonia.⁷⁰ In the peace agreements, Germany was put in a unique position. The Bolsheviks in Russia had begun to assemble a force to reconquer Estonia and the other Baltic States. The Allies in the West, however, did not wish to see this happen. Because the Germans were already in this area, they were therefore to retreat from the Baltic lands and defend them from the encroaching Red Army. The first attack, at the end of November, was held off by the Germans,⁷¹ but soon

⁶⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 43.

⁶⁸ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁶⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 44.

⁷⁰ See note 68 above.

⁷¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 44-45.

after the Red Army invaded Estonia, “seriously” threatening Estonia’s new independence.⁷² The Bolsheviks declared the “Estonian Workers Commune” to replace the existing form of government.⁷³ The Estonians, however, had already been operating under their own democratic republic for a few weeks, and most had no real interest in the Bolshevik ideology.⁷⁴ Estonia would have to use the force of arms to “assert its claim to self-determination.”⁷⁵ The Russian invasion was the beginning of the Estonian War for Independence, yet another time in Estonian history where they fought to free themselves from occupation.⁷⁶

According to Rein Taagepera, “For the Estonian government, the main enemy [in the War for Independence] was its own lack of organization.”⁷⁷ Many Estonians were tired after four years of World War I, and many thought that they had little chance of defeating the Russians. For this reason, by December, “two-thirds of the country was in Bolshevik hands.”⁷⁸ The Estonians were eventually able to turn the tide of the war, improving their organization and obtaining financial help from Finland.⁷⁹ The British Navy also swooped in to help when the Bolshevik Navy attempted to invade Tallinn. The combination of these developments bolstered many Estonians, and even Finns, to join the cause of Estonian national statehood, despite a

⁷² Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

⁷³ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 44-45.

⁷⁴ See note 73 above.

⁷⁵ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 1.

⁷⁶ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁷⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 45.

⁷⁸ See note 77 above.

⁷⁹ See note 77 above.

minority of Estonians supporting the Bolsheviks. In March 1919, all foreigners had been forced off Estonian lands.⁸⁰ The Estonians, weary from years of fighting, immediately tried to end the war, and they achieved an armistice on December 31st, 1919. The Tartu Peace Treaty followed on February 2nd, 1920, recognizing Estonia's independence and setting forth trade relations with Russia.⁸¹ Soon after, Soviet Russia signed treaties with Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland.⁸² According to Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, "Nation-building could now proceed unhindered."⁸³

After independence, the Estonians faced many challenges, as they needed to restructure their entire society to adapt to their newly achieved status. They embarked on a major land reform project to finally break up the large land holdings of the foreign (mostly German) elite. Much of this land was converted into family farms and went to those who fought in the War for Independence.⁸⁴ According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, roughly 32,000 new farms were created during this period.⁸⁵ The Estonian economy lagged after the loss of the Russian markets. According to John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, "When the Baltic provinces became the Baltic States, they lost the foundations of their economic prosperity...the Russian empire."⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

⁸¹ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁸² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 46-47.

⁸³ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 10.

⁸⁴ See note 83 above.

⁸⁵ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 13.

⁸⁶ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 76.

Estonians eventually developed their own oil-shale and timber industries to complement their largely agrarian economy. While these industries helped the struggling Estonian economy, Estonia lacked the manufacturing necessary to become an industrialized society, and this issue would continue for decades to come.⁸⁷ Politically, the new legislature of independent Estonia, known as the “Riigikogu,” passed its first constitution, which was known for being “one of the most democratic in the world.”⁸⁸ Internationally, European countries recognized Estonia as a country in 1921, and the U.S. followed in 1922.⁸⁹ Estonia became a member of the League of Nations on September 22nd, 1921.⁹⁰ Within a few years, Estonians had successfully transitioned into their own country at last.

Through the 1920s, Estonia remained a successful democratic republic. When the effects of the Great Depression spread around the world, however, the governments of the Baltic States were shaken.⁹¹ Economic depression exacerbated political instability in the early 1930s, and starting in 1934, authoritarianism reigned in Estonia.⁹² Similar events took place in the other Baltic countries as well. In 1938, Estonia held elections once again, partially relaxing the authoritarian grip on the country and issuing in an era of “modest democratic recovery.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 10-11.

⁸⁸ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

⁸⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 48.

⁹⁰ See note 87 above.

⁹¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 49.

⁹² Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 12.

⁹³ See note 91 above.

During this time, the Estonian national culture continued to develop. According to Rein Taagepera, "Education at all levels became available in Estonia. Tartu University switched to the Estonian language, and a technical university was founded in Tallinn. An Estonian Academy of Sciences also was founded."⁹⁴ Taagepera continues to describe Estonians and their society during this time:

It should be kept in mind that we are talking here about a very limited time span of twenty years and a very young culture in a modern sense. With few exceptions, these citizens were people who grew up on farms; they included a first-generation educated elite who received this education under quite adverse conditions. All too many of them were in their twenties before completing high school. Once free from Russian and German pressures, they still had to create the social, cultural, and material surroundings that normally form the atmosphere and springboard for unusual talent. That they were able to approach the world level in most aspects might be sufficient achievement for the first twenty years.⁹⁵

As we know, however, Estonia's modest achievements would not have the chance to continue indefinitely, as Europe, and more specifically, the Baltic States, were soon to be ravaged by World War II.

As the interwar period became increasingly complex with the emergence of Hitler, the aggression of the Japanese, and the development of the Soviet Union, Estonia and the other Baltic States tried to remain neutral. They signed a series of neutrality pacts, first with the Soviet Union, and later with Germany.⁹⁶ In August of 1939, the Germans and the Soviets signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression treaty that would be crucial to the future of the Baltic countries.⁹⁷ Publically, this agreement only stated that Germany and the U.S.S.R. would

⁹⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 52.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 52-53.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁷ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

not engage in any sort of aggression against each other. Secretly, however, the pact laid out a plan for dividing up Eastern Europe. One secret sentence of the pact is as follows: "In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R."⁹⁸ Though the Baltic States were independent countries, Germany and the Soviet Union had divided them up for themselves.

These events came to a head when World War II began with Hitler's invasion and quick defeat of Poland in September of 1939.⁹⁹ As part of the secret agreement, the Soviet Union was to receive the Eastern part of Poland, along with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, after Poland's defeat. Stalin had sent 160,000 Soviet troops to Poland to occupy his new territory. He then ordered them to the Estonian border, demanding that Estonia allow the U.S.S.R. to form military bases in the country. Given that Estonia's army had only 16,000 men, they had little choice but to negotiate with the Soviets.¹⁰⁰ On September 28th, Estonia and the Soviet Union signed a "mutual assistance pact," officially allowing Soviet military bases to be built in Estonia.¹⁰¹ Though the pact technically allowed for continued Estonian independence, autonomy would be increasingly unrealistic. The Estonian government's policy was simply to "maintain good

⁹⁸ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 105.

⁹⁹ Šmidchens, Guntis, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolutions*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), 135.

¹⁰⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁰¹ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

relations with the USSR and to avoid incidents with the garrisons until the international political climate improved.”¹⁰² What else could they do?

According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, “In an ominous portent of things to come, Hitler initiated the evacuation of the vast majority of the Baltic German population to the Reich during October-December 1939.”¹⁰³ Similarly, in the first half of 1940, the Estonian government deposited “11 tons of its Gold reserve in Britain, Sweden, and Switzerland,” suggesting that it foresaw the trouble that was coming. Hitler invaded France in May 1940, and Stalin used this to his advantage. Because the world’s attention was turned on France, the Soviets proceeded to take control of the Baltic States. They sent notes to Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, “accusing their governments of breaking their pacts with the USSR and of plotting...anti-Soviet alliances.”¹⁰⁴ The USSR demanded that Estonia allow unlimited numbers of Soviet troops into the country and for the “formation of pro-Soviet government cabinets.”¹⁰⁵ With no other options, Estonia gave into the Soviet demands.¹⁰⁶ The next day, “some 90,000 additional troops entered the country.”¹⁰⁷ By June 1940, Estonia and the other Baltic States were occupied countries.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 17.

¹⁰³ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 27.

¹⁰⁴ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 19.

¹⁰⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 61.

¹⁰⁶ See note 104 above.

¹⁰⁷ See note 103 above.

¹⁰⁸ See note 105 above.

The main Soviet goal was to make it appear that Estonians actually wanted them to take control. In July of 1940, the Soviets staged elections, with candidates from the new communist “Estonian Working People’s League” usually the only ones on the ballot.¹⁰⁹ The Soviets “openly threatened political nonvoters,” and the Soviet army was present in most of the polling rooms throughout the country.¹¹⁰ When the ballots were counted, the pro-EWPL vote was 92.9 percent, though according to Rein Taagepera, this number is “meaningless in the view of intimidation, elimination of choice, and shameless falsification.”¹¹¹ After the elections, the Soviets also organized demonstrations in Estonia, calling for incorporation into the Soviet Union. According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, “The Soviet Union went to great lengths to dress up this forcible incorporation as a popular revolution.”¹¹² The “Estonian masses” involved in these demonstrations included some Estonian communist sympathizers, but mostly “recently released prisoners, civilian Soviet workers..., and Soviet military and naval personnel.”¹¹³ On August 6th, 1940, Estonia was officially annexed into the Soviet Union, with Latvia and Lithuania joining as well.¹¹⁴ While all of this occurred, the world knew that “no one [had truly] asked the Estonian population for its opinion” on the matter.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 62.

¹¹⁰ See note 109 above.

¹¹¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 63.

¹¹² David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 28.

¹¹³ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 21.

¹¹⁴ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonia-s-history.html>.

¹¹⁵ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 29.

In the first year as part of the Soviet Union, the Soviets replaced Estonian officials with “imported” Communist officials from the USSR.¹¹⁶ The Soviets engaged in land reform policies and economic reforms beneficial to the Soviets, causing shortages of goods throughout the country. Though the Soviets increased wages for working class Estonians, increases in prices caused an overall drop in purchasing power.¹¹⁷ Many working class Estonians were forced out of their homes to make room for the “colonial” oppressors, mostly Russians, moving in from the rest of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ In schools, the Soviets were now in charge of educational oversight, banning books and the Estonian flag, and cutting pages out of textbooks that had references to independent Estonia. Similarly, existing Estonian cultural organizations were disbanded and replaced with Soviet, communist organizations.¹¹⁹

Though the economic, educational, political, and cultural reforms were clearly upsetting to the Estonian people, they were “not the worst aspects of the process” of inclusion into the Soviet Union.¹²⁰ Before World War II, “the Stalinist regime had already starved millions and shot the better part of a million [people].”¹²¹ Though Stalin’s Great Purge had largely come to an end in the rest of the Soviet Union, he now initiated the policy of mass deportations in the Baltics.¹²² In June of 1941, the Soviets initiated a “mass terror” in Estonia.¹²³ In one night, 6,640

¹¹⁶ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 65.

¹¹⁷ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 21.

¹¹⁸ See note 116 above.

¹¹⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 66.

¹²⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 39.

¹²¹ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), x.

¹²² See note 120 above.

people were deported, with men going to slave labor camps and women and children sent to Siberian collective farms.¹²⁴ Far greater numbers of Estonians would be deported on the “eve of the German invasion in June 1941.”¹²⁵ Some estimates say that the number of Estonians deported during that first year under Soviet occupation is somewhere around 10,000.¹²⁶ Others estimate that the numbers were in fact closer to 18-19,000 Estonians.¹²⁷

According to Timothy Snyder, “Hitler had always intended to conquer the western Soviet Union.”¹²⁸ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been advantageous to the Nazis with the invasion of Poland of 1939, as Hitler did not want to engage in war with the Soviet Union just yet. By the summer of 1940, however, Hitler had conquered France and the Low Countries, to the dismay of the rest of the world. As his empire (and his confidence) increased, Hitler saw that “the Soviet Union was the only realistic source of calories for Germany and its west European empire, which together and separately were net importers of food,” so he began to develop plans to invade the USSR, make it a German colony, deport half its population, and use the rest of the people as “slave labor.”¹²⁹ Hitler prepared his army to invade the Soviet Union, in what he would call “Operation Barbarossa”.¹³⁰ On the eve of invasion, the Soviet Union conscripted roughly 33,000

¹²³ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹²⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 67.

¹²⁵ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 115.

¹²⁶ See note 123 above.

¹²⁷ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 34.

¹²⁸ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), 157.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

Estonian men into the Soviet army.¹³¹ Between draftees, deportees, massacres, and unexplained disappearances, the total loss to the Estonian population for that year is “estimated at 54,000-60,000, almost 6% of the total population.”¹³²

The mass terror imposed on the Estonian population was supposed to scare them into submission. It ultimately, however, had “an opposite effect from that intended” by the Soviets.¹³³ As a response to the new circumstances in Soviet Estonia, “many men took to the forests, where they formed the nucleus of a resistance movement.”¹³⁴ The Soviet terror, while in fact instilling fear in the Estonian population, also “deepened hatred for the regime, especially among those who might otherwise have remained neutral.”¹³⁵ This hatred was increased exponentially by the Soviet actions upon their retreat. According to John Alexander Sweetenham, when the Germans invaded, the Soviets did not have time to evacuate the inmates of their prisons and concentration camps. For this reason:

The Bolsheviks killed the prisoners on the spot or executed them in the forests. The terrible thing is that they did not kill the prisoners outright but first tortured them in the crudest way. They cut strips out of their backs, tore out their tongues, gouged out their eyes, cut off their ears, noses and sometimes their genital organs and thrust them into the mouths of the victims.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), 155.

¹³¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 67.

¹³² David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 34.

¹³³ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 43.

¹³⁴ See note 132 above.

¹³⁵ See note 133 above.

¹³⁶ Sweetenham, John A. *The Tragedy of the Baltic States: A Report Compiled From Official Documents and Eyewitnesses' Stories*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), 138.

John Hiden and Patrick Salmon write that “in such circumstances it is not surprising that many members of the majority populations of the Baltic countries welcomed the German armed forces when they crossed the frontiers of Lithuania on 22 June 1941 and pressed on into Latvia and Estonia” as the first step of Operation Barbarossa.¹³⁷ While the Nazis were invading the country, the “Forest Brothers,” as the resistance fighters came to be called, fought to push Soviet officials out of the Estonian government and reinstate Estonian independence.¹³⁸ Many Estonians were hopeful that they could regain independence once the Nazis had defeated the Soviets. According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, “The experiences of the previous year led many Estonians to greet the Germans as liberators, an illusion which was swiftly dispelled during the early months of Nazi occupation.”¹³⁹ Their hopes, as usual, were dashed.

By October 1941, the Nazis were in control of Estonia and the other Baltic States.¹⁴⁰ The Nazis proceeded to disband the resistance movement and “flatly reject” proposals for independence.¹⁴¹ Hitler’s long-term plans for the Baltic countries were to resettle half the population to make room for German colonists. In the short-term, he proceeded to harness “Estonian manpower and resources to the war effort.”¹⁴² In November, the Nazis set up a

¹³⁷ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 115.

¹³⁸ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹³⁹ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 35.

¹⁴⁰ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 68.

¹⁴¹ See note 139 above..

¹⁴² See note 139 above.

“German civilian administration” in Estonia to quash all hopes of independence and show the Estonian people that unfortunately “one occupation had been replaced by another.”¹⁴³

As Rein Taagepera puts it, the Estonians during this time period were caught “between two wolves.”¹⁴⁴ Estonians knew that both Nazi and Soviet occupation would lead to horrendous devastation and no steps closer to independence. Timothy Snyder discusses the extreme difficulty that the Baltic peoples faced:

The double occupation, first Soviet, then German, made the experience of the inhabitants of these lands all the more complicated and dangerous. A single occupation can fracture a society for generations; double occupation is even more painful and divisive. It created risks and temptations that were unknown in the West. The departure of one foreign ruler meant nothing more than the arrival of another. When foreign troops left, people had to reckon not with peace but with the policies of the next occupier. They had to deal with the consequences of their own previous commitments under one occupier when the next one came; or make choices under one occupation while anticipating another.¹⁴⁵

While Estonians and the other Baltic peoples looked to the Western Allies for help, they quickly realized that this help was not coming.¹⁴⁶ As one of Germany’s main goals was to eliminate all the Jews of Europe, their “Einsatzgruppen” mobile killing units followed the German army into the Baltics.¹⁴⁷ As the Germans moved in and the Soviets withdrew, about 4,000 of the 5,000 Estonian Jews fled to Russia.¹⁴⁸ Einsatzgruppe A, the German killing unit assigned to the Baltics, killed the remaining 1,000 Jews, often with the assistance of Estonian police, militia, and volunteers. Hiden and Salmon write that “the record of Baltic collaboration in the murder of their

¹⁴³ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 69.

¹⁴⁵ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), 190.

¹⁴⁶ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 121.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 70.

Jewish fellow citizens is a shameful one. Yet there is little in their previous record to suggest that it would have taken place without German instigation.”¹⁴⁹ In July 1942, Estonia was the first German territory to be declared “free of Jews.”¹⁵⁰

During the time of German occupation, the Nazis saw the Estonians as “providers of farm products, labor, and also later as cannon fodder.”¹⁵¹ The Germans had taken over the economy, the government, and even education, adding Nazi biology and history to Estonian textbooks.¹⁵² The Nazis had also used roughly 15,000 young Estonians in their labor corps, known as the “Reichsarbeitsdienst.”¹⁵³ To the Nazis and their final plans, however, the Estonians were largely disposable. Some historians claim the Nazis executed as many as 6,000 Estonians during the occupation, many for having collaborated with the previous Soviet occupiers.¹⁵⁴ As the war progressed, the invasion of the Soviet Union slowed, especially with the arrival of winter. Hitler, invading in June 1941, had expected the defeat of the Soviet Union to occur in “nine to twelve weeks,” but it had now been over a year since the invasion.¹⁵⁵ In this atmosphere, the Estonians became “increasingly attractive” for military use.¹⁵⁶ In August of 1942, the Germans announced

¹⁴⁹ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 118.

¹⁵⁰ “Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁵¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 69.

¹⁵² See note 151 above.

¹⁵³ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 43.

¹⁵⁴ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 35.

¹⁵⁵ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), 166.

¹⁵⁶ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 70.

the creation of the "Waffen SS," asking for Baltic volunteers to fight for the Germans.¹⁵⁷

Because the Nazis had become increasingly unpopular in the Baltics, however, only a few thousand volunteers came together from the three countries. As a result, by 1944, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were being drafted into the German army to fight their previous Soviet occupiers.¹⁵⁸ In 1943, a legion of about 11,000 Estonians was created. Some had been forced to fight, some had picked military service over the Reichsarbeitsdienst, and some joined to avenge deportations or their loved ones.¹⁵⁹

By early 1944, it was clear that the German invasion was not a success. The Soviets were back on the Estonian border.¹⁶⁰ Estonians were determined to gain independence, rather than once again being trapped under Soviet rule. The underground independence movements in the country came together to form the "National Committee of the Republic of Estonia." The goal of the committee was to "organize resistance to the Soviet invader and to prepare for the establishment of a provisional government following the expected German withdrawal."¹⁶¹ To do this, the committee gave power to Jüri Uluots, the prewar prime minister, who would try to restore independence.¹⁶² To help Estonians arm themselves for their coming fight, Uluots suggested that Estonians join the German army, and 38,000 answered that call.¹⁶³ Unfortunately

¹⁵⁷ "Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁵⁸ See note 157 above.

¹⁵⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 70.

¹⁶⁰ See note 159 above.

¹⁶¹ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 36.

¹⁶² See note 157 above.

the Germans were on the retreat, and the Soviets were moving west with a renewed sense of purpose. The Soviets broke through Estonian lines on September 22, 1944. The independent provisional government, headed by Uluots, had lasted for four days before Estonia fell back into Soviet hands. As the Soviets moved back in, they brought with them a “wave of robbery, looting and rape.”¹⁶⁴ Rein Taagepera points out that “Soviet occupation forces did not “liberate” Tallinn from the Germans, but seized it from the Estonians.”¹⁶⁵

LIFE IN SOVIET ESTONIA

With the onset of yet another occupation, the Estonian people feared the unknown. “What would happen next? Would there be another deportation? Would more people be killed?”¹⁶⁶ In examining the Soviet re-occupation of Estonia in 1944, John Alexander Swettenham writes that “the Soviet system was re-imposed and the measures started in 1940-41 were continued from where they had been left off.”¹⁶⁷ According to David J. Smith and his colleagues, “Soviet terror duly resumed in the autumn of 1944, when an estimated 30,000 people were deported from ‘liberated’ areas of the Baltic States.”¹⁶⁸ On May 8, 1945, World War II finally came to an end.

¹⁶³ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 70.

¹⁶⁴ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 71.

¹⁶⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 71.

¹⁶⁶ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁶⁷ Swettenham, John A. *The Tragedy of the Baltic States: A Report Compiled From Official Documents and Eyewitnesses' Stories*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), 155.

¹⁶⁸ David Smith et al., *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. (USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 36.

In total, Estonia lost 20% of its pre-war population.¹⁶⁹ The Yalta Conference would ultimately determine that the Baltics were to be left in Stalin's hands, and they would once again be Soviet Republics.¹⁷⁰ The Baltic States emerged in 1945 as "the only members of the League of Nations not to be restored to full sovereignty after the Second World War."¹⁷¹ The first Soviet occupation had lasted only a few years. The second would last for almost fifty. Writing in the early 1950s, John Alexander Swettenham concluded that "the terror under the second Russian occupation is more horrible and relentless than the first...The population is deprived of all security, the Baltic nations are exploited in the interests of the U.S.S.R. and are given no opportunity whatever to recover from the wounds of the war."¹⁷² How would Estonians survive under yet another occupation? What would life be like?

The Estonian Communist Party (ECP) was reestablished in Estonia. While originally the party consisted mostly of Russians, more Estonians would join as it became apparent that this occupation would more permanent than they hoped. According to Toivo Raun, "The high percentage of non-Estonians in the ECP...suggests not only Moscow's distrust of Estonians but also a reluctance of Estonians themselves to take part in the Sovietization of their homeland."¹⁷³ "Fake elections" were held in 1947, much like those held shortly after the first occupation. They were meant to show the world that Estonia (and the Baltics as a whole) were in favor of their

¹⁶⁹ Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (USA: Basic Books, 2012), 313.

¹⁷¹ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 118.

¹⁷² Swettenham, John A. *The Tragedy of the Baltic States: A Report Compiled From Official Documents and Eyewitnesses' Stories*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), 157.

¹⁷³ Raun, Tovia U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 170.

Soviet occupations, though this was clearly not the case.¹⁷⁴ According to a video from the Tallinn Museum of Occupations, “People didn’t want to go along with the new order, but one has to live and work.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, most Estonians were just trying to survive in this new, dangerous environment.

To ensure compliance in the Baltics, the Soviets dispatched 500 occupation troops to each county.¹⁷⁶ The NKVD, or the Soviet police, began interrogating the population about their collaboration with the Germans.¹⁷⁷ During the next five years (1944-1949), 12,000 Estonians, deemed “German collaborators,” would be arrested.¹⁷⁸ These arrests would be paired with increasing deportations during this time period as well. Almost 21,000 Estonians were deported by 1949, with 3,000 of these perishing in Siberia.¹⁷⁹ Becoming ever more present in Estonian life, the NKVD recruited “informants and snitches, often through extreme pressure” and threats.¹⁸⁰ Resistance to Soviet authority became increasingly difficult, especially when the Soviets began using “physical interventions” to get confessions from the population.¹⁸¹

The lands and cities in the Baltics were largely destroyed by the war and the crisscross of armies across the fields. In fact:

¹⁷⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 71.

¹⁷⁵ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁷⁶ See note 175 above.

¹⁷⁷ Manning, Clarence A. *The Forgotten Republics*. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952), 232-233.

¹⁷⁸ See note 175 above.

¹⁷⁹ Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

¹⁸⁰ See note 175 above.

¹⁸¹ See note 175 above.

95% of the dwellings in Tartu had been destroyed or damaged and the proportion in the other cities was well over 50%. The number of livestock was reduced by over one half, there were practically no grain supplies, the factories were destroyed, and the Soviet army burst out of control as undisciplined barbaric hordes, killing and raping and plundering at will with no attempts by the officers to stop them.¹⁸²

The Soviets made propaganda videos blaming the Germans for the devastation, though many of the cities were in fact destroyed by the Soviets in an effort to destroy the Estonian identity. If the Soviets could destroy the parts of Estonia that made the people uniquely Estonian, they could force Estonians to become part of their own Soviet identity and therefore stop resisting.

Estonians alive during the time remember how monuments in the cities were often destroyed to make the Estonian people “forget their history.”¹⁸³ This is just one example of how the Soviets did and took what they pleased in the occupied lands. One Estonian remembers that the Soviet officers would often come “visit” his mother when his father was a work. Another Estonian remembers how the Soviet soldiers entered his village and began stealing. When one man tried to stop them, “they killed him with an axe handle.”¹⁸⁴ Writing in 1952, Clarence A. Manning accessed the situation with the following statement: “Within the three Baltic Republics since World War II life has continued to go on, but in a very real sense history has ceased to exist.”¹⁸⁵

Along with physically destroying and rebuilding cities, the Soviets also used the development of industry to “Russify” Estonia. Deportations of Estonians made room for the Russian colonizers who would begin moving into Estonia to work in the new factories.¹⁸⁶ In fact,

¹⁸² Manning, Clarence A. *The Forgotten Republics*. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952), 232-233.

¹⁸³ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁸⁴ See note 183 above.

¹⁸⁵ Manning, Clarence A. *The Forgotten Republics*. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952), 237.

“the number of industrial workers tripled in six years,” in attempts to bring the Soviet ideology and culture to life in Estonia.¹⁸⁷ (By 1970, ethnic Estonians would only make up 68% of the population of Estonia.¹⁸⁸) Estonia’s role in the Soviet Union would be to supply it with heavy industry. An oil-shale industry was developed, and with it came rapid industrial growth: 36% per year. The Estonian farms struggled to keep up as the population expanded, and a policy of rationing was soon initiated. One Estonian remembers how people would wait in lines for their rations. The lines would form overnight and could be as long as half a kilometer just for sugar.¹⁸⁹

As the Soviets continued to hunt out German collaborators and “Russify” the Estonian way of life, many people fled to the woods to join the fugitive life of the “Forest Brotherhood.”¹⁹⁰ Throughout the Stalinist Era (1944-1953) in Estonia, as many as 30,000 Estonians were part of this guerrilla group.¹⁹¹ They joined for many reasons. Some were actual German collaborators who hoped to escape arrest. Some held democratic views and knew that they were likely targets of arrests or deportations. For many, “Patriotic idealism was an important motive.”¹⁹² According to Rein Taagepera, “the sloppy randomness of the...repression units, and lack of due process, in fact made practically everyone a target...People went to the

¹⁸⁶ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 130.

¹⁸⁷ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁸⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 96.

¹⁸⁹ See note 187 above.

¹⁹⁰ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 79.

¹⁹¹ See note 187 above.

¹⁹² Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 84.

forests mainly when they could no longer take the insecurity of civilian life."¹⁹³ According to a documentary from the Tallinn Museum of Occupations, "Some [Forest Brothers] fought, while others simply hid."¹⁹⁴ Those who fought attacked Soviet military convoys and officers, often using surprise assaults along roads and forests.¹⁹⁵ The Forest Brotherhood began its decline 1949, when forced collectivization began. At that point, the guerrillas lacked external support from the increasingly destitute populations who used to provide them with food and clothes.¹⁹⁶ The Soviet forces also had a large advantage in their numbers, arms, and mobility, and they could easily sweep the forests and eliminate the resistance. While most fugitives proceeded to reenter civilian life, some continued to hide, the last of whom survived until 1978. This specific fighter drowned himself rather than be captured by the Soviets.¹⁹⁷

Adults were not the only Estonians to resist Soviet occupation. In fact, school boys also did their part by destroying Communist monuments in Tallinn, Tartu, and other cities. In total, 82 trials were held during the period of 1945-53, and 700 school children were incarcerated. Other youths were assisting the resistance by printing opposition leaflets. As these movements grew, the Soviets were interested in finding out where underground student activities took place and how to stop them. To do so, they interrogated those they had captured. One Estonian remembered that those getting interrogated were willing to sign or say anything, just to make the

¹⁹³ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 79.

¹⁹⁴ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁹⁵ See note 194 above.

¹⁹⁶ Raun, Tõivo U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 174.

¹⁹⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 80.

torture stop. Another remembers, "They beat everyone."¹⁹⁸ The Soviets pressured lecturers and professors at the University of Tartu to teach Soviet and Marxist-Leninist theory, in hopes that student resistance would decline. Scholarly journals were discontinued, as the main goal of publications became a "reevaluation of the Estonian heritage."¹⁹⁹ Censorship began, books were burned, and the Estonian national and cultural identity was drained.²⁰⁰ According to Hiden and Salmon, "In the years between 1945 and 1985 the Soviet Union came closer than any past rulers to extinguishing the national identities of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian peoples."²⁰¹

According to Rein Taagepera, "Forced collectivization of agriculture was the step that not only broke the guerrilla resistance but also eliminated the last segment of private enterprise."²⁰² While collectivization had begun during the first occupation, in March 1949, collectivization was expedited. Within a month, 56% of Estonian farms had been converted into kolkhozes, or state-owned collective farms.²⁰³ During this time as well, at least 20,000 Estonian farmers were deported. Targets of this deportation experienced the following: "The victims had between ten minutes and two hours to pack their things. After weeks in boxcars, they were dropped off in west Siberian and northern Kazakh kolkozoes to fend for themselves: build cavelike huts, tear up the ground to grow food, and survive somehow."²⁰⁴ By 1952, 97.1% of the

¹⁹⁸ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

¹⁹⁹ See note 198 above

²⁰⁰ See note 198 above.

²⁰¹ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. (USA: Longman Inc., New York, 1991), 126.

²⁰² Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 81.

²⁰³ Raun, Tõivo U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 179.

Estonian farms would be collectivized.²⁰⁵ As part of Stalin's Five Year Plans, farmers would be hit with heavy taxes and unmanageable production quotas. According to one Estonian, the collectivization of agriculture by the Soviets had many objectives. "One of them was to destroy the farms of Estonia because that is where the Estonian salt-of-the-earth came from. Obviously, if left untouched, the Russians would not have been able to sow the seeds of their mentality here. Besides, the farms helped and provided for those who were in the woods."²⁰⁶

The Soviets during the Stalinist period further attacked Estonian culture in the early 1950s, hoping to eliminate the "national bourgeois". The Soviets imported tens of thousands of Russians into Estonia and also arrested and executed Estonian playwrights and novelists.²⁰⁷ They began to provide all the music for traditional Baltic song and dance festivals. These festivals were often used as propaganda to show the "collectiveness" of the Soviet people.²⁰⁸ The Soviets also "silenced and infiltrated" religious organizations.²⁰⁹ In April of 1955, Jehovah's Witnesses and members of other "forbidden sects" were deported from the country.²¹⁰ Soviet books were printed by the thousands, and children were forced to participate in communist youth organizations. Simultaneously, many ethnic Estonians were purged from the ECP. According to Rein Taagepera, "History was blatantly falsified to present Russians as Estonia's saviors

²⁰⁴ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 81

²⁰⁵ Raun, Tõivo U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 179.

²⁰⁶ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁰⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 87.

²⁰⁸ Šmidchens, Guntis, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolutions*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), 146.

²⁰⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 85.

²¹⁰ Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

throughout the ages, and Russians were presented as superior to Estonians and other nations.”²¹¹

According to one Estonian, while all of this was occurring, Estonians were disappointed that the “white ship” of the Western Allies provided no assistance: “We waited for the white ship to come. We truly believed in it...What came instead were the deportations. No one came. It felt like betrayal. Hope was lost.”²¹²

By the early 1950s, “the Soviet system stood firmly on its feet.”²¹³ Collectivization and Russification continued. From 1951-1954, the Soviet army combed the forest for resistance, and the movement was largely eliminated. According to historian Enn Tarvel, “It looked like Comrade Stalin would live forever.”²¹⁴ While Soviet propaganda called Stalin the “best friend of the Estonian people,” Estonians knew what life under Stalin truly meant.²¹⁵ Rein Taagepera summarizes this time period:

From the vantage point of 1952, every year since 1939 had brought Estonia major changes; since 1944, there had been a succession of shattered hopes. The guerrilla resistance was broken, and hopes for relief by the west had been abandoned. On the personal level, the hope to escape terror had to be given up. Terror had reached German collaborators and anti-German Estonian patriots, then private farmers, intellectuals, and native communists. Terror had become an expected norm, and in this sense things had normalized. The spirit of irony and mental resistance that met the first Soviet measures in 1940 had dissipated. The Estonian population was numb, and terror had outlasted its purpose.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 87.

²¹² “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, Stalin Era: 1944-1950,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*, Online Film Series, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²¹³ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Stalinist Era: 1950-1956,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²¹⁴ See note 213 above.

²¹⁵ See note 212 above.

²¹⁶ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 88.

Stalin died on March 5, 1953.²¹⁷ While in Moscow mourners were so distraught that they trampled over 400 people, “Estonians had to conceal their joy.”²¹⁸ The people hoped that Stalin’s death would bring changes to the difficult situations placed on them by the Soviets.

At this time, Estonia’s “only hope” had been Stalin’s death, but “his death had come and the empire and its political system had survived.”²¹⁹ While many Soviets vied for power in the vacuum created by Stalin’s death, Lavrenty Beria became the most powerful leader, assuming power over the Ministry of the Interior.²²⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera write that “the struggle for succession in the Kremlin allowed for a slight and gradual extension of the functions and privileges of the [Baltic] republics’ administrations.”²²¹ Beria sought to increase Soviet control over border areas by allowing ethnic Estonians more of a role in the Soviet system. While many Estonians considered this action to be a step in the right direction, on June 26, 1953, Beria was arrested by his comrades and was eventually executed. Nikita Khrushchev would take his place.²²²

According to Rein Taagepera, “By 1954, the Soviet control of Estonia was no longer viewed as a temporary occupation... The habit of mentally [and physically] challenging every Soviet command slowly shifted into the less stressful habit of submission.”²²³ This shift occurred

²¹⁷ Zubok, Vladislav, M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 86.

²¹⁸ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Stalinist Era: 1950-1956,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²¹⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 89.

²²⁰ See note 217 above.

²²¹ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 131.

²²² See note 218 above.

in part because Khrushchev's policies were seen largely as a "thaw" compared to the much harsher policies of Stalin.²²⁴ This thaw included "the dismantling of most of Stalin's terror apparatus, the rehabilitation of many of his victims, and the return of surviving deportees."²²⁵ In fact, 80% of Estonians imprisoned by the Soviets were released during this time.²²⁶ The intelligentsia of the country was allowed more freedom, and the Baltics experienced limited contact with capitalist countries of the surrounding area. Some Estonians were even allowed to travel outside the country for the first time in years.²²⁷ The size of "Soviet repression forces was reduced," the Baltic States gained more economic autonomy, and more ethnic Estonians were allowed to hold government positions in the ECP.²²⁸ All of these policies contributed to "a new era of rising political expectations" and proved that the "Soviet regime was ready for reforms."²²⁹ The thaw gained more force in 1956, when Khrushchev denounced Stalin and his "cult of personality." Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera write that "Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin...released a shock-wave which furthered the trend toward an increased stature for the republics within the Soviet system. The condemnation of the "cult of personality" implicitly reaffirmed the need to observe the law and the "sovereignty" of the republics."²³⁰ Rein

²²³ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 90.

²²⁴ Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

²²⁵ Raun, Tovi U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 195.

²²⁶ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Stalinist Era: 1950-1956," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²²⁷ Raun, Tovi U. *Estonia and the Estonians*. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 189.

²²⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 90-91.

²²⁹ See note 225 above.

²³⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 133.

Taagepera reminds us, however, that while these improvements were dramatic with the Stalinist Era in mind, conditions in Estonia “continued to be utterly miserable when compared with... [its] Western neighbors.”²³¹

According to Rein Taagepera, this thaw largely ended with the Soviet aggression in Hungary in 1956.²³² Hungarians, with the election of the more moderate Imre Nagy, sought more autonomy from the Soviet Union. Their hopes reflected those of all the other “occupied” peoples of the Soviet Union, including Estonians. Unfortunately, Nagy was “ousted” in April 1955.

According to William I. Hitchcock:

On 22 October, a meeting of students, intellectuals, and factory workers was held at the Technological University in Budapest and adopted a wide-ranging list of demands, including the removal of Soviet troops for Hungary...and the replacement of ...Imre Nagy. They also called for the “reexamination” of Hungary’s relations with the Soviet Union, holding of multiparty elections, freedom of press and assembly, and the prompt removal of the massive statue of Stalin that still stood in central Budapest.²³³

A mass demonstration followed the next day, and ultimately the Hungarian police fired on the unarmed demonstrators, turning the demonstration into “a revolution.”²³⁴ This event became known as the “Budapest Uprising.”²³⁵ In the same month, Khrushchev had faced a “near uprising in Poland,” so he determined that he needed to “use force to crush the rebels.”²³⁶ After a violent few days, the Soviets decided to engage in a full-scale military invasion of Hungary, as the

²³¹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 95.

²³² *Ibid.*, 90.

²³³ Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. (USA: Anchor Books, New York, 2003), 207-208.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

²³⁵ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Stalinist Era: 1950-1956,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²³⁶ Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. (USA: Anchor Books, New York, 2003), 208.

country “would have to be shown that there were limits to what Moscow would allow in the era of de-Stalinization.”²³⁷ On November 4th, the Soviet army invaded Budapest, and ultimately, the Hungarians fought them for 49 days. According to a documentary from the Tallinn Museum of Occupations, “the Soviet Union was now a state with a double standard.”²³⁸ Moscow wanted to reform the policies of Stalin, yet it was still using overt terror to crush the people. The Hungarians were defeated, and Budapest was destroyed. For those in the rest of the Soviet Union, these were the “weeks of broken illusions.”²³⁹ According to Estonian historian Enn Tarvel, “Everyone could see that the Soviet system had not really changed and that the attitude of the West about defending democracy and freedom had not changed either.”²⁴⁰

In the 1960s, Estonians “became accustomed to their circumstances. Their desire to survive and get ahead became hallmarks of the period.”²⁴¹ According to one Estonian, “when hope died in Hungary, it died here as well.”²⁴² One Estonian who lived through the decade claims that this was the time that “Estonian resistance broke.”²⁴³ The early 1960s saw reforms in the collective agriculture system. For example, the system of “daily labor norms” was replaced with a salary system, the failing and ineffective collective farms were largely replaced with state

²³⁷ Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. (USA: Anchor Books, New York, 2003), 210.

²³⁸ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Stalinist Era: 1950-1956,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²³⁹ See note 238 above.

²⁴⁰ See note 238 above.

²⁴¹ See note 238 above.

²⁴² See note 238 above.

²⁴³ See note 238 above.

farms, and tractors were distributed.²⁴⁴ In 1964, Khrushchev was forced to resign, and Leonid Brezhnev became the new leader of the Soviet Union. Estonians and the other occupied peoples of the Soviet Union held their breath. According to Vladislav Zubok, "The new guard in the Kremlin quickly terminated de-Stalinization from above."²⁴⁵ He also writes that "under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leadership abandoned reformist projects."²⁴⁶ The thaw that Khrushchev initiated would soon be coming to an end.

The increased economic autonomy that Khrushchev had championed quickly came to an end as well. According to one Estonian, this brought a close to "one of the more positive episodes in the history of Soviet economic policy."²⁴⁷ Rein Taagepera writes that although "the pace of reforms slackened during the 1960s...a feeling of making some headway lasted."²⁴⁸ The "Soviet aggression" against Czechoslovakia would bring an end to these "years of hope."²⁴⁹ It also made Estonians increasingly concerned about the prospects of a "Stalinist crackdown on Baltic autonomy, limited as it already was."²⁵⁰

According to William I. Hitchcock:

The events that became known as the Prague Spring fit a familiar pattern: a reform program undertaken by Communists that swiftly moved beyond the original intentions of the reformers to take on a life of its own. As in Hungary in 1956, so in Czechoslovakia in

²⁴⁴ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Sixties: 1956-1968," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁴⁵ Zubok, Vladislav, M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 190.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴⁷ See note 244 above.

²⁴⁸ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 95.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

²⁵⁰ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 204.

1968, independent, autonomous Communists could not be allowed to challenge the integrity of the Soviet empire.²⁵¹

Czech communist leader Alexander Dubcek intended to carry out a series of reforms in Czechoslovakia, but he “quickly discovered that he could not reconcile his twin objectives of reforming the party through greater democratization and maintaining strong ties with the Soviet Union.” Dubcek ended censorship in the country, and this brought out the “pent-up frustration” of the Czech people toward the Soviet Union. Dubcek began to lose control of the reform efforts he initiated, and more and more Czechs got involved.²⁵² Meanwhile, Estonians in Tartu held candlelight processions to show their support, as “events in Czechoslovakia awoke people’s hopes in Estonia.”²⁵³ On August 20-21, 1968, the Soviets invaded Prague with a force of 400,000 Soviet troops, and within a few hours, “the Prague Spring was over.”²⁵⁴ On the subject of Czechoslovakia, Rein Taagepera comments that “Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia ushered in a period of hopelessness and loss of vigor in Estonia and, indeed, throughout the Soviet empire.”²⁵⁵ According to Estonian historian Enn Tarvel, by the end of the 1960s, “The Soviet regime seemed to be a lasting certainty to both its supporters and those who hated it.”²⁵⁶

Many historians use the term “stagnation” to describe Soviet Estonia in the 1970s. Rein Taagepera calls this time the “years of suffocation” because of the “almost painlessly slow but

²⁵¹ Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. (USA: Anchor Books, New York, 2003), 288.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 290-291.

²⁵³ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Sixties: 1956-1968,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁵⁴ Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. (USA: Anchor Books, New York, 2003), 292.

²⁵⁵ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 97.

²⁵⁶ See note 253.

relentless squeeze on the national psyche through colonization and infringement of the Russian language on ever-new aspects of social life.”²⁵⁷ Not only would Estonians see continued cultural pressures and increases in Russification attempts in the 1970s but also economic stagnation and new proof that the Soviet system could not truly compete with the West. While the early 1970s saw an increase in available consumer goods throughout the USSR, this relative prosperity would not last. There were good shortages, including food, already beginning in 1975.²⁵⁸ Agricultural policies soon began to fail. Estonian historian Enn Tarvel notes that the Soviet Union, though at its height militarily, had slipped into “deepening economic decline.”²⁵⁹ He describes this situation in greater detail:

The USSR proved to be incapable of keeping up with the scientific and technical revolution taking place in other countries. Her economy revolved mainly around material goods was wasteful of resources. Raw materials were sold on the world market. Estonia’s economic development also began to stagnate. The sharp rise in the price of raw oil that began in 1974 made it possible to continue for some time while carrying on development of military production. The Soviet Union couldn’t compete in the arms race, nor was she up the task of launching a war.²⁶⁰

The continued emphasis on the extraction of raw materials caused increasing pollution and environmental problems in Estonia as well, yet they were “totally ignored.”²⁶¹ Brezhnev is often criticized for his role in the overall Soviet decline, as he also stagnated when it became increasingly clear that reforms were necessary to save the Soviet system.²⁶² He was apparently

²⁵⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 97-98.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁵⁹ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Period of Stagnation: 1968-1987,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁶⁰ See note 259 above.

²⁶¹ See note 259 above.

²⁶² See note 257 above..

“too listless to carry them out.”²⁶³ One Estonian recalls that “what the economy needed was development, but instead of that we got propaganda.”²⁶⁴

During this time, Moscow believed that it had finally succeeded in creating one “Soviet people.”²⁶⁵ Soviet indoctrination often began before nursery school, and language restrictions were increased during this time. “National and linguistic differences were supposed to disappear.”²⁶⁶ Estonian song festivals, a tradition that continued from the country’s “National Awakening,” were carried out in Russian for the first time.²⁶⁷ 10,000 Russians continued to come into Estonia every year. By 1979, ethnic Estonians comprised of only 65% of the population of their country. According to Rein Taagepera, this Russification campaign, technically taking place from 1978-1982,²⁶⁸ would have mixed results. Increasingly, Estonian culture had been influenced by the West while the Russification was occurring.²⁶⁹ The Estonians “were determined not to yield a single cultural or educational position without argument or delay.”²⁷⁰ Most likely, Estonians understood and felt the decline in Soviet world power, and they took a stance of holding on until the inevitable: the disintegration of the Soviet Union.²⁷¹ In fact, in 1979, the Baltic States collectively urged the UN to vie for their freedom in what became known

²⁶³ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Period of Stagnation: 1968-1987,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁶⁴ See note 263 above.

²⁶⁵ See note 263 above.

²⁶⁶ See note 263 above.

²⁶⁷ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 101.

²⁶⁸ Estonia’s History,” *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

²⁶⁹ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 99.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

as the "Baltic Charter." Their pleas were met with increased repression.²⁷² The Estonian Democrats involved in the appeal would be arrested and given prison sentences, though these punishments were far less harsh than in previous years. Taagepera writes that "this pattern was to repeat itself over and over: Half-hearted repression gave dissent the publicity it needed to survive."²⁷³

Romauld Misiunas and Rein Taagepera write that "it could almost be said that dissent...was, almost by definition, endemic within the Baltic republics."²⁷⁴ Organized dissent, beginning in the 1960s, was bolstered by the publication of the "samizdat" essays which reflected on the importance of the "survival of the Estonian nation."²⁷⁵ These essays would eventually get out of the Soviet Union and reach the West, further progressing the cause. Estonian leaders in the ECP were increasingly able to effectively navigate their relationship with Moscow to progress Estonian interests.²⁷⁶ In December 1976, college students at the University of Tartu protested the Soviet regime after it refused to allow a pop concert at the university.²⁷⁷ Dissent would continue into the 1980s at all levels of the population and throughout the USSR. Students, intellectuals, democratic groups, and even politicians, to some extent, would continue to press for Estonian independence, and the new atmosphere of the time permitted it. According

²⁷² Estonia's History," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia*, Accessed August 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-history.html>.

²⁷³ Taagepera, Rein, *Estonia: Return to Independence*. (USA: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 102.

²⁷⁴ Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990*. (USA: University of California Press, 1993), 250.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 264.

²⁷⁶ "Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Period of Stagnation: 1968-1987," *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁷⁷ See note 273 above.

to Estonian historian Enn Tarvel, “It was just a matter of time until the USSR would disintegrate.”²⁷⁸ Estonian independence would eventually come, but their history of occupation would never leave them.

Stay free, Estonia’s sea!
Stay free Estonia’s shore!
Then every proud Estonian
Shall fear not snow nor storm.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ “Occupations in the Recent History of Estonia: 1940-1991, The Period of Stagnation: 1968-1987,” *The Tallinn Museum of Occupations*. Online Film Series. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/en/movies>.

²⁷⁹ Šmidchens, Guntis, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolutions*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), 111.

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ESTONIA: HISTORY OF OCCUPATION, THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE, AND THE
ESTONIAN IDENTITY
THESIS 2: THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE AND THE ESTONIAN IDENTITY

Anna Wiegand
Honors 499: Honors Thesis
2015

THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

In Estonia the celebration of independence is an ongoing process. Should one spend a year in the small country, he or she would experience at least four days of celebration or remembrance of Estonia's past struggles and hard-won victories. Estonian Independence Day on February 24 commemorates the formation of the Republic of Estonia and the Tartu Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia. This holiday is not to be confused with August 20, the Day of Restoration of Independence. September 2 is Resistance Fighting Day, and November 16 is the Day of Declaration of Sovereignty.¹ The Estonians' fierce pride in their small country becomes clear when one looks at the region's tumultuous history.

On September 17, 1991, Estonia's blue, black, and white flag was raised in front of the United Nations headquarters in New York City.² This symbol of international recognition was the end of a long series of events that culminated in Estonia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.³ Today Estonia has the highest GDP per capita of any post-Soviet nation at 15,186 EUR in 2014.⁴ Estonia currently has a population of roughly 1.3 million, many of whom reside in the capital city of Tallinn and the main university town, Tartu.⁵ An estimated 300,000

¹ "Estonian Holidays in 2015," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/country/estonian-holidays.html>

² "Estonia's Return to Independence 1987-1991," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-return-to-independence-19871991.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Economy in Numbers," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/economy-a-it/economy-in-numbers.html>

⁵ "Estonia at a Glance," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/country/estonia-at-a-glance.html>

people speak Estonian worldwide, and it is now the country's official language, though Russian, English, German, and Finnish are also commonly spoken.

Part I of this thesis chronicles Estonia's many years under foreign occupation, ending notably with the Soviet era, a period characterized by oppression of Estonian national identity. Estonia's Danish, German, Swedish, Polish-Lithuanian, and Russian influences can still be seen today, embedded in the architecture, culture, and language. Going through so many occupations has made the Estonians used to surviving and to hiding their culture until they can once again display it proudly.

Other than the brief independence during the interwar period, the years since the fall of the Soviet Union are the first time that the people of Estonia have had to think about what it means to be an independent country. Estonia's struggle for independence, when combined with other events in the region, became a critical part of the pressure that led to the overall collapse of the USSR. After this long fight for independence, the country's leaders had to take steps to preserve Estonian language and culture, integrate its Russian-speaking citizens, and balance the country's relationship with Russia against its desire to integrate into Europe. Considering the suffering that many Estonians endured, Estonia's relative lack of "exclusive identity narratives" or outright denunciations of minorities is astounding.⁶ In the article "Shifting the Perspective of Identity Discourse in Estonia," Gregory Feldman of Syracuse University talks about how major population shifts wreaked havoc on the country. He summarizes how USSR policies dramatically affected the Estonian demographic landscape:

After the war the Soviet Union instituted a policy of heavy industrialization in addition to militarizing the country to protect the USSR's Baltic flank. These policies involved

⁶ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 413.

massive demographic shift, which resulted in large numbers of ethnic Russians migrating to the new Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic to bolster the labor pool, to serve in the Soviet military, and to occupy the upper echelons of the Soviet bureaucracy. Between 1645 and [the 1990s], the total population increased from 830,000 to 1,453,844 with Estonians now comprising sixty-five percent and Russians comprising twenty-eight percent of the total population, respectively.⁷

How can the country successfully create and maintain a national identity when it has been repressed for so long? How can the country integrate into the EU while coexisting with its own Russian-speaking minority? Considering Estonia's past, the fear of "cultural extinction" is grounded in real and serious issues that cannot be taken lightly.⁸

Estonia's political and economic restructuring is important in the maintenance of Estonian culture and sovereignty, but equally as vital is the Estonians' ability to preserve their language and traditions as the years go by. As a generation of young people that have never known Estonia as an occupied country comes of age, these questions about national identity become ever more crucial and interesting. In an unprecedented era of freedom, Estonia must continue to preserve its history and remember its past while moving into the modern, post-independent world.

With the new Soviet policies of glasnost and perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the USSR starting in 1985, "occasioned rather than caused the remarkable contemporary awakening of the Baltic republics."⁹ This ideological shift would set the stage for a series of demonstrations and changes that would eventually lead to independence. From 1985-1987, much

⁷ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 412.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman Group, 1991), 147.

time was lost as elites in Moscow did a lot of talking about but little realization of what needed to be done.¹⁰ When change did finally come, it came relatively quickly and unexpectedly, and the Soviet leadership was ill prepared to deal with it.

For Estonia, real steps toward change began with a heated debate over phosphorous mining. In the 1970s, new phosphorus deposits were discovered in Estonia, and the Soviet government began to formulate plans to mine it. This worried Estonians because, as had been seen before, Soviet mining practices had the potential to contaminate important water sources and disrupt the ecology.¹¹ Additionally, many Estonians had helped with rescue work after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, which would help explain the fervor of the protests.¹² By 1987, after years of complaints from scientists and citizens, it became clear that the Soviet authorities had no convincing economic reason to pursue the mining. According to Rein Taagepera in his book *Estonia: Return to Independence*, most Estonians saw it as a "pretext for bringing in more colonists."¹³

As more and more evidence surfaced about the inanity of the project, public outrage mounted. Political activists capitalized on the mood and organized a demonstration in Tallinn's Hirvepark that would coincide with the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop

¹⁰ Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 32.

¹¹ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 121.

¹² Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 70.

¹³ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 121.

Pact (MRP).¹⁴ The Soviet government backed down. The demonstration's success not only stopped the mining, but also opened up the MRP as a point of public discussion. According to Guntis Smidchens in his book *The Power of Song*, "environmental issues were tied to questions of sovereignty over the country's natural resources, and public discussion inevitably shifted to national sovereignty."¹⁵ It was the first important breakthrough in popular consciousness.¹⁶ Two years later on the same anniversary, Estonian citizens would participate in a much larger demonstration that spanned the Baltics.

1988 proved a crucial year in the awakening of Estonian national identity. That spring, the traditional blue, black, and white flag reappeared, though it was still technically banned.¹⁷ It was the spring of the flag, and it led to the summer of the Singing Revolution. The Singing Revolution is often the focus of discussions of the Estonian independence movement. During the Tallinn Old Towne Days from June 11-14, 1988, 60,000 people gathered for the first Night Song Festival.¹⁸ On June 14, Estonians commemorated the 1941 deportations. As the general population banded together, the leadership started to mobilize as well. In the political arena, both the Popular Front of Estonia (PFE) and the Estonian National Independence Party (ENIP)

¹⁴ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 122.

¹⁵ Guntis Smidchens, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 237.

¹⁶ "Estonia's Return to Independence 1987-1991" *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-return-to-independence-19871991.html>

¹⁷ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 133.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

formed in 1988.¹⁹ ENIP was the more radical of the two parties, while PFE tended to appeal to a broader popular base.

The two parties were often in conflict, especially over parliamentary elections. While the PFE supported Gorbachev's reform policies and put forth candidates for Supreme Soviet, ENIP supported the entirely separate Estonian Congress, "the alternative parliament with strong national undertones that was trying to hold its own elections and register Estonian citizens according to the pre-war constitution."²⁰ This radicalism sparked ever-greater demands for independence. By September Estonian was restored as the country's national language. On November 16, 1988, the Supreme Soviet of Estonia adopted a policy that effectively declared the country's sovereignty by saying that Estonian authorities had to approve all Soviet laws before they could come into effect.²¹ In the coming months, various polls showed the increasing national support for an independent Estonia.

Estonia stands out in its path to independence due to the mostly peaceful nature of its methods. In May 1989, delegates from all three Baltic countries met in Tallinn to organize a demonstration that would signal a "clear desire for a radical redefinition of identity."²² On August 23, 1989, again on the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, an

¹⁹ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 133, 140.

²⁰ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States after Independence* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996), 85.

²¹ "Estonia's Return to Independence 1987-1991" *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/estonias-return-to-independence-19871991.html>

²² David Kirby, *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (New York: Longman Group, 1995), 433.

“estimated two million people linked arms in a human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius to demand the restoration of independence—an impressive and poignant demonstration of the popular mood.”²³ Unlike the protest in Hirvepark, this demonstration captured international attention. By the time the Human Chain occurred in 1989, the possibility for independence, or at least increased autonomy within the Soviet Union, looked possible in a way that simply had not been feasible in 1987. Additionally, the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, shocked Soviet leaders. This unexpected event increased their unease over the situation in the Baltics, though Gorbachev still assumed that the region could be kept under Soviet influence with economic incentives.²⁴ Despite these crucial measures, the country still had a long way to go before becoming the independent Republic of Estonia.

The Human Chain was an important exercise in community organizing. It also signaled Baltic solidarity to Moscow, which might have been able to crush a rebellion if only one of the three countries had caused problems. The leaders of the Baltic States “felt they would have to act rapidly so as to become part of the Central European chain reaction before it petered out.”²⁵ On February 24, 1990, Estonian citizen committees held congressional elections without going through the Soviet bureaucracy.²⁶ About a year later in the beginning of 1991, Boris Yeltsin, the newly elected President of the Russian Federation, came to Tallinn to sign treaties on mutual

²³ David Kirby, *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (New York: Longman Group, 1995), 433.

²⁴ Vladislav N. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 327.

²⁵ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 169.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

recognition of sovereignty with the Estonian and Latvian parliaments.²⁷ His visit came as a response to the violence in Vilnius, Lithuania and Riga, Latvia. He helped the Baltic leaders to appeal to the United Nations to intervene on their behalf and “issued a personal appeal to Russian troops stationed in the Baltic republics not to use arms against civilians.”²⁸ His support helped the governments in their struggle with Soviet authorities in Moscow and was one of the main reasons that the violence was kept to a minimum in Estonia. Today, a bas-relief memorial in Tallinn’s Old Town honors his part in the path toward Estonian autonomy.

In the end, no single event led to Estonia’s independence. A combination of political and economic shifts, as well as an awakening of Estonian national identity, combined to bring about the changes. Even the less successful measures were important in creating a sense of unease in Moscow and increasing Estonian national resolve. Additionally, Gorbachev relied on Western economic assistance, and couldn’t risk responding to the growing rebellion in the Baltics with much force.²⁹ Gorbachev personally disliked resorting to force, and he knew that the United States would be less likely to intervene in Soviet affairs if he refrained from doing so.³⁰ Showing favor to the Baltic countries could cause increased unrest in other parts of the Soviet Union.

While many Westerners tend to attribute the fall of the Soviet Union to external forces, in the end the Soviets’ own decisions led to their destruction. In his book *A Failed Empire*,

²⁷ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 146.

²⁸ David Kirby, *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe’s Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (New York: Longman Group, 1995) 434.

²⁹ Serhii Plokhy, *Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colorado: Basic Books, 2014), 195.

³⁰ Vladislav N. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 320.

Vladislav Zubok says “most scholars and analysts conclude that the Soviet superpower met its end at the hands of its own leadership under the influence of new ideas, policies, and circumstances.”³¹ The political climate that the policies of glasnost and perestroika created was crucial in spurring on Estonian leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens to seek independence. The events in Estonia were an important factor in influencing the overall situation in the Soviet Union.

On September 2, the United States was the 41st state to recognize Estonia’s independence, despite the Soviet Union’s delay in doing so.³² Boris Yeltsin had already recognized Baltic independence on August 24, leaving “hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians, most of whom had moved to the region after World War II, beyond the borders of Russia and the Union.”³³ The United States and other nations of Western Europe had always been supportive of Baltic independence, just never supportive enough to go to war. During the Cold War, the United States seemed to accept the Soviet Union’s de facto control of the Baltic countries, and though it stopped diplomatic relations, “the American government recognized the sovereign authority of the three Baltic legations and worked with them.”³⁴ Ultimately, however, it was the politicians and activists in Estonia that brought the country to independence.

³¹ Vladislav N. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 303.

³² Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 204.

³³ Serhii Plokhy, *Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colorado: Basic Books, 2014), 174.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

After independence, becoming full members of the European Union and NATO became one of Estonia's top political priorities. Estonia signed a Partnership for Peace agreement with NATO in 1994, and later became the first post-Soviet country to enter into negotiations with the EU about the possibility of membership.³⁵ Some worried that integration with the EU would pose a threat to Estonian identity.³⁶ Those worries were eventually overridden when Estonia joined the European Union and NATO in 2004. Estonia also faced challenges with its monetary policy and currency. It's still possible to find Kroons, the pre-war form of Estonian currency, in tiny bookstores and antique shops throughout the country. In 1989 the newly formed Bank of Estonia made plans to begin printing them again.³⁷ Kroons were the national currency until 2011, when Estonia officially became a part of the Eurozone.

Estonia is now a democracy with a President, Prime Minister, and Parliament. The country holds national elections every four years, the most recent of which occurred on March 1, 2015. In these elections, the center-right Reform Party (RP) maintained its hold on power, forming a coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL) parties.³⁸ Taavi Roivas is the current prime minister and leader of the RP, which

³⁵ Merje Kuus, "European Integration in Identity Narratives in Estonia: A Quest for Security," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 1. (Jan 2002): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/425259>

³⁶ Ibid., 103.

³⁷ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman Group, 1991), 177.

³⁸ "The Estonian Government," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/country/government.html>

supports conservative economic policies and a closer alignment with the EU.³⁹ According to Reuters, 70 percent of Estonia's Russian-speaking population supports the Centre Party, an offshoot of the Popular Front of Estonia led by Edgar Savisaar, who encourages closer ties with Russia.⁴⁰ The party signed a cooperation deal with the United Russia Party in 2004.⁴¹ Saavisar has previously stated that Russia's annexation of Crimea could be legitimate.⁴² Despite some Estonians' desires to form a closer bond with Russia, most Estonian leaders remain wary, and "Estonia's armed forces have been on high alert since Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine."⁴³ In recent years Estonia has dealt with multiple airspace violations, and in 2014 Russia detained an Estonian security guard and accused him of spying.⁴⁴ Prime Minister Roivas worries that Russia could seek to destabilize Estonia, which could account for his strong views on economic integration and increased security measures.

Estonia's main goal since independence has been increased integration with the European economy. According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, Estonia mainly trades with

³⁹ "Prime Minister Taavi Roivas wins Estonia election," *EurActiv.com*, last modified Mar. 2, 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/elections/prime-minister-taavi-roivas-winsestonia-election-312522>

⁴⁰ David Mardiste, "Estonia's ruling, pro-NATO center-right claims election win," *Reuters.com*, last modified Mar. 1 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/02/us-estonia-election-idUSKBN0LX15620150302#PB363xYu8P36Wjp2.97>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Estonia's ruling Reform Party win's election victory," *BBC News*, last modified Mar. 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31681293>

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Russia, Sweden, Finland, the other Baltic States, and the U.S.⁴⁵ The controversial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership—a secretive trade agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and the U.S. that would reduce trade barriers—has a high rating of approval in Estonia, with 72 percent of the population for it and only 11 percent against it (17 percent don't know).⁴⁶ In the 1990s, Estonia still depended heavily on the Russian economy. The adjustment period was swift, and Estonians essentially went cold turkey from a planned to a free market economy. In order to combat high inflation and encourage international trade, Estonia established a fixed exchange rate early on.⁴⁷ Alan Palmer briefly describes this transition in his book *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and Its People*:

In Estonia, ruthless competitiveness out-Thatchered Thatcherism: there would be no helping handout of subsidies to inefficient factories or agriculture, despite the difficulty of reverting from ineffectual Soviet collective farms to smallholdings. Finnish investment bolstered Tallinn and its port but, with St. Petersburg so close, the economy was too dependent on a Russian economy that needed shots in the arm from the International Monetary Fund to stave off disaster. When Russia devalued the ruble in 1998 the Estonian economy faltered but it began to recover with the spread of tourism.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Estonia,” *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, accessed Nov. 8, 2015, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/est/#Exports>

⁴⁶ “Public Opinion Analysis,” *Eurobarometer Interactive Search System: European Commission*, accessed Nov. 2, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showmap.cfm?keyID=3905&nationID=11,1,27,28,17,2,16,18,13,6,3,4,22,7,8,20,21,9,23,24,12,19,29,26,25,5,14,10,15,&startdate=2014.11&enddate=2014.11#fcExportDiv

⁴⁷ Karsten Staehr, “Austerity in the Baltic States During the Global Financial Crisis,” *Review of European Economic Policy* 48, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2013): 293, <http://www.intereconomics.eu/archive/year/2013/5/austerity-in-the-baltic-states-during-the-global-financial-crisis/>

⁴⁸ Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 402.

The major bump in the road of Estonia's economic growth occurred during the 1998 Russian economic crisis.⁴⁹ As the country moved away from dependence on Russia, it experienced rapid economic growth. From the year 2000 until the global financial crisis, the average growth rate in Estonia was eight percent per year, by far the highest in the newly enlarged EU.⁵⁰ In Estonia, this period of rapid growth came to an end in 2009, when the country underwent remarkable fiscal consolidation and austerity measures after the global recession hit.⁵¹ According to Karsten Staehr of the Tallinn University of Technology, "the global financial crisis and its reverberations have fundamentally altered the economic landscape in the Baltic states. The depth of the crisis was a reflection of unsustainable pre-crisis booms."⁵² Estonia was able to make a comeback after the recession and continues to thrive today with more stable levels of growth and the strongest economy of any post-Soviet country.

Opinions on economic issues sometimes differ substantially between Estonians and Russians within the country. Russian speakers formed a considerable minority after independence and tended to keep themselves somewhat separate from the ethnic Estonian population. Some might think that this relatively separate population would be more interested in maintaining ties with Russia, but this turned out not to be the case. In late 1996, more Russian speakers were in favor of joining the European Union than were ethnic Estonians (78 percent vs.

⁴⁹ Karsten Staehr, "Austerity in the Baltic States During the Global Financial Crisis." *Review of European Economic Policy* 48, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2013): 294, <http://www.intereconomics.eu/archive/year/2013/5/austerity-in-the-baltic-states-during-the-global-financial-crisis/>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 298.

⁵² Ibid., 302.

59 percent).⁵³ Today Russia is Estonia's top export destination and import origin.⁵⁴ Still, tension exists as a carryover from an era characterized by fear and distrust of one's neighbors. As mentioned in Part I, many Estonians were forced to choose between joining either the Nazis or the Red Army. The repercussions of these decisions are still being felt today. Along with Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia must learn how to deal with a past where main governmental officials had close ties to the Soviet government in Moscow. These politicians represent many Russian-speakers who perhaps were not supportive of Estonian independence, but under the new democratic regime their voices must be heard. In both politics and in remembering the past, the Estonians take part in a delicate balancing act. The Estonian government seeks "to prevent honoring the dead from harming the living."⁵⁵

Who are the liberators, and who are the oppressors? Many people in Estonia's sizeable Russian population have complained of discrimination and false accusations of being ex-KGB.⁵⁶ The integration of the ethnic Russian minority was a huge topic of discussion and speculation after independence. Some scholars suggested that Estonia would experience a nationalistic backlash aimed at Russian-speakers, since some Estonians saw their presence as a threat to the survival of Estonian culture and national identity.⁵⁷ In the early 1990s, the question of who

⁵³ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 151.

⁵⁴ "Estonia," *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, accessed Nov. 8, 2015, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/est/#Exports>

⁵⁵ Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 404.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

should automatically receive citizenship and who should have to apply for it posed a serious problem.

During the Soviet occupation, many Russophones⁵⁸ came to the Baltics to live and work. Estonia effectively excluded this population with its post-independence citizenship laws, which were based on the "right of blood."⁵⁹ This meant that people who had Estonian citizenship before the Soviet occupation were again granted unconditional citizenship, while anyone not meeting these requirements (encompassing much of the Russian speaking population) had to go through a naturalization process.⁶⁰ Consequently, a large number of Russian-speakers chose to take citizenship in a country other than Estonia.⁶¹ Pal Kolsto points out in the book *Nation Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* that "while the total number of Russophone non-citizens in Estonia is only half of what it is in Latvia, as many as 83,000 of them had taken Russian citizenship by February 1996."⁶² By October of the same year, this number had reached roughly 116,000, showing that Russophone non-citizens in Estonia consistently preferred to acquire citizenship in another country, as opposed to other Baltic states such as Latvia.⁶³ Even

⁵⁷ Merje Kuus, "European Integration in Identity Narratives in Estonia: A Quest for Security," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 1. (Jan 2002): 103, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/425259>

⁵⁸ This term refers to Ukrainian and Belorussian speakers in addition to Russian speakers.

⁵⁹ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States after Independence* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996), 189.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁶¹ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 98.

⁶² Ibid.

so, many other Russian-speakers stayed because they felt that Estonia was their home. The northeast, particularly the city Narva, retains the highest levels of Russian speakers in the country.⁶⁴ Meanwhile in Latvia the Russian-speakers tend to be more spread out in the cities and somewhat in more rural areas.⁶⁵

Though questions of citizenship have largely been resolved, Estonia currently faces many demographic challenges. Between 1980 and 2010, Estonia has experienced a decline in both natural and migratory growth.⁶⁶ As the country's birth rates decline, it becomes more difficult to preserve the language and culture. Fixing this problem by encouraging more immigrants, however, leads to the same issue. Estonian language skills are a must for people who wish to work in Estonia, so this makes it difficult for immigrants to find jobs. Estonia also must deal with a rapidly ageing population. Unlike other Eastern European countries, Estonia has a large proportion of citizens over the age of 68.⁶⁷ In 2008, this age group accounted for 17-20 percent of the population.⁶⁸ Part of this issue stems from "brain drain," as the young, educated Estonians often leave their homeland to find work in other countries such as Finland or Germany, which have a higher standard of living. Since their acceptance into the EU, Estonia's migration policy

⁶³ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁵ See note 64 above.

⁶⁶ Alexandre Avdeev et al., "Populations and Demographic Trends of European Countries, 1980-2010," *Population* 66, no 1 (2011): 20-22.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pop/summary/v066/66.1.avdeev.html>

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

has largely been focused on combating this relocation problem.⁶⁹ While the country has many issues to deal with on the domestic level, it also has international responsibilities.

EU membership has many positive attributes, but it also forces Estonia to involve itself with issues that would not otherwise affect the country in its tucked away, far-North location. The current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, in which Estonia has agreed to take 150 asylum seekers, has instigated a new wave of logistic and political difficulties.⁷⁰ Currently, Estonia only has one refugee center in the tiny, Northeastern city of Vao. Estonian citizens are divided over the idea of welcoming newcomers, as past experience with colonists and deportations leaves many Estonians wary of outsiders and the changes they bring.⁷¹ In the 2015 election cycle, a new anti-immigration conservative party—combined with a free-market liberal party—won 15 seats in parliament.⁷² Still, many members of the younger generations hope the migration policies will be welcoming despite the fears about unsuitable infrastructure and lack of resources.⁷³ Negotiations over refugee quotas will continue to shape Estonia's relationship with the EU.

⁶⁹ Richard Martyn-Hemphill, "The migrants that made this mouse roar: Estonia grapples with political fallout from its own refugee crisis," *Politico*, last modified Sept. 2, 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/estonia-migrants-refugees-asylum-eu/>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Isabelle De Pommereau, "Estonia's past plays into refugee debate," *Deutsche Welle*, last modified Sept. 9, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/estonias-past-plays-into-refugee-debate/a-18740819>

⁷² "Estonia's ruling Reform Party win's election victory," *BBC News*, last modified Mar. 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31681293>

⁷³ Isabelle De Pommereau, "Estonia's past plays into refugee debate," *Deutsche Welle*, last modified Sept. 9, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/estonias-past-plays-into-refugee-debate/a-18740819>

Refugees and immigrants coming to Estonia face some of the same challenges that the thousands of Russian speakers did after independence. When Estonian became the only national language, many workers faced the possibility of losing their jobs. On January 18, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR enacted language laws "which made Estonian the state language again and demanded that within four years officials and sales personnel should be able to work in both Estonian and Russian."⁷⁴ Implementation of this law met with trouble when it came into effect on June 18, 1993.⁷⁵ Understandably, the law caused frustration among the Russian-speaking population, since previously only Russian was needed to function effectively in society. Many of the colonists who came to live in Estonia during the Soviet era did not think of it as a separate country with its own culture but rather as another Russian province.⁷⁶ Although the focus of language laws in Estonia was bilingualism for Russian speakers rather than a total banning of Russian, "some colonists demanded the right to remain monolingually Russian."⁷⁷ This resentment, plus the time it takes for people to learn the language, made it difficult to enforce language laws, especially in the years immediately following independence. Again, this issue disproportionately affected the northeastern section of the country, which contains a large population of Russian speakers. Enforcing the language laws in this region would cause it to "come to a standstill, and vital functions like the hospital service would be

⁷⁴ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman Group, 1991), 151.

⁷⁵ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States after Independence* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996), 180.

⁷⁶ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 141.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

paralyzed.”⁷⁸ Many private companies used this opportunity to get rid of extra workers, and many Russian speakers saw the laws as a way to keep large proportions of the Slavic minority out of the work force.⁷⁹

This sentiment is especially prevalent in the education sector, where many teachers (who previously taught entirely in Russian) must now give some—or in some cases, all—instruction in Estonian. Many Russian-speaking teachers don’t feel that they have the language ability to set a good example for their students.⁸⁰ Additionally, older teachers who worked during the Soviet era sometimes harbor resentment against younger teachers who have a better command of the language. Although the government has implemented many language-learning programs for educators, many teachers still feel unsupported by the government and by their communities.⁸¹

Tatjana Kiilo and Dagmar Kutsar, a graduate student and an Associate Professor at the University of Tartu, advocate for a more sensitive approach to the implementation of new language policies, based on their research into the professional identities of Russian-speaking teachers. Since the educators of the future generations play a vital role in the development of the children’s confidence and language ability, it is important for teachers to have confidence in their abilities in order to set a good example. There is also a need “to engage Estonian-speaking teachers in cooperation with their Russian-speaking colleagues in order to decrease the

⁷⁸ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States after Independence* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996), 181.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Tatjana Kiilo and Dagmar Kutsar, “Dilemmas Related to the Professional Self-Identity of Russian-Speaking Teachers in Estonia: Adapting and Accommodating to Changes in The Language-in-Education Domain,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 44, no. 4 (Jun. 2013): 6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2013.805503>

⁸¹ Ibid., 17-18.

segregation between the two groups.”⁸² Some studies have shown that non-native students from bilingual families face less exclusion from society and generally find it easier to fit in with their peers.⁸³ This need is not limited to the education sector, and increased confidence in Estonian language will help integration and cohesiveness in all areas of the economy.

Estonian nationalists worry that Estonian culture is too small to effectively coexist with the large Russian-speaking population without being drowned out. Another perspective sees the Russian-speaking population as rightful citizens of a society that has become increasingly multicultural and multilingual over the past 50 years.⁸⁴ The Estonian government has funded efforts to get people to relocate to Russia, but many people prefer the economic and political situation in Estonia to that in Russia and have established their lives in Estonia.⁸⁵ These people have little desire to move away from what they feel is their home to an unknown future in Russia or some other part of Eastern Europe. Although many scholars and onlookers worried that the country would eventually devolve into ethnic conflict, Estonia has made political, economic, and social transitions with relative success. Tensions between the ethnic Estonian and Russian populations still need addressing, but for the most part, the two populations coexist peacefully.

⁸² Tatjana Kiilo and Dagmar Kutsar, “Dilemmas Related to the Professional Self-Identity of Russian-Speaking Teachers in Estonia: Adapting and Accommodating to Changes in The Language-in-Education Domain,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 44, no. 4 (Jun. 2013): 24, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2013.805503>

⁸³ Elvira Kuun, “The Ethnic and Linguistic Identity of Russian-Speaking Young People in Estonia,” *A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 12, no. 2 (2008): 200, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 24, 2015).

⁸⁴ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States after Independence* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996), 182.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

This peace has given Estonia the chance to develop its sense of national pride and to recover from the many years of cultural oppression.

BUILDING A NATIONAL IDENTITY

Some aspects of Estonian culture, such as religious life, had been basically destroyed by the Soviet occupation, while other aspects including as tourism and the arts finally had the chance to thrive upon independence. Many Estonians celebrate Christmas and other religiously based holidays, but the country has the distinction of being one of the least religious countries in the world.⁸⁶ Religion has always been around in Estonia, though it has not necessarily played an influential role. From the time of the Reformation, the Baltic Germans exerted a strong Protestant Lutheran influence on the region, in contrast to the neighboring Catholics and Orthodox Russians.⁸⁷ The Russians brought in an Orthodox influence, and all the religious groups coexisted in relative peace until the early twentieth century.

Churches were particularly hard hit by the Soviet regime. According to Anatol Lieven in his book *The Baltic Revolution*, “the Estonian Orthodox Church, which in 1920 had declared its independence from the Moscow patriarchate, was forcibly reintegrated into the Russian Orthodox Church” when Soviet occupation resumed.⁸⁸ Estonia is also home to a small

⁸⁶ “Christmas Customs in Estonia,” *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/culture-a-science/christmas-customs-in-estonia.html>

⁸⁷ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 133.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

population of "Old Believers," who live in the Lake Peipsi region in the East.⁸⁹ The Old Believers, who today number around 15,000, faced persecution during the years of WWII along with the Jewish community. As mentioned in Part I, the Nazis murdered much of Estonia's Jewish population, and Estonia was the site of multiple concentration camps. A small Jewish community of about 2,000 people exists in Estonia today, and in May 2007, a new synagogue opened in Tallinn.⁹⁰ Various pagan groups also exist in Estonia, though they number very few.⁹¹ Most of the Orthodox Christians in Estonia are Russian speakers, and the Estonian-speaking religious population is mostly Lutheran Protestant. Overall, it is unclear how much influence religion has in the country, and it is "doubtful whether religion will in fact be able to take on a wider social and cultural role."⁹²

While religion has declined, other parts of Estonian culture have undergone a rebirth. Estonians have distinguished themselves with their creation of a small but vibrant art industry. The first Estonian-language poem was written about the Soviet deportations, and the Estonians continue to use art to remember and work through the horror of their past. The film *1944*, which came out in theaters on February 20, 2015, depicts the struggle of Estonians on both sides of WWII, where brother was forced to fight against brother in what many Estonians perceived as a

⁸⁹ "Russian Old Believers in Estonia," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/society/russian-old-believers-in-estonia.html>

⁹⁰ "The Jewish Community in Estonia," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/society/the-jewish-community-in-estonia.html>

⁹¹ "Finno-Ugric Peoples," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/society/finno-ugric-peoples.html>

⁹² Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 367.

foreign war. The country's film industry is especially impressive considering the ratio of Estonian language films to Estonian speakers in the world. Estonia celebrated the 100th anniversary of its film industry in 2012; in 1912, an Estonian photographer filmed a stunt pilot in Tartu, which is considered the first Estonian movie.⁹³ Estonian films were overpowered by the German and American film industries in the early twentieth century, and the independent Estonian film industry was later incorporated into the Soviet film industry.⁹⁴ Today's film industry receives subsidies from the state and is no longer under any ideological restrictions; consequently, many modern Estonian movies are high quality, catching international attention.⁹⁵ The film *Tangerines*, about an Estonian man in living in Georgia in 1990, won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2014, and *1944* is up for the same category in 2015.⁹⁶

Estonian film is not the only art form that has garnered worldwide exposure. Arvo Part is probably the best-known Estonian composer, world-renowned for his modernist music. In his article about Estonian identity discourse, Gregory Feldman says:

Promoting [Part] as a carrier of Estonian culture enhances the impression of Estonia as serious producer of 'high art' and avoids the usual habit of presenting Estonia as an exotic other which ultimately will bore visitors and which investors will not take seriously. This narrative comes into conflict with the narrative of Estonia as a reconstituted state and society, which would champion traditional cultural images deriving from the National Awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹⁷

⁹³ Jaan Ruus, "Estonian Film 100," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/culture-a-science/estonian-film.html>

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Submissions to the Oscars 2016 for Best Foreign Language Film," *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/list/ls074281817/>

⁹⁷ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 416.

These “traditional cultural images” include the general stereotypical perception of the Estonian people as quaint, agricultural, hardworking, and self-sufficient.⁹⁸ While the political elite may consider these labels unhelpful in their quest to establish Estonia as a modern nation, many Estonians involved in tourism capitalize on the international perception of Estonian culture as “quaint.” In handicraft stores around the country, tourists can find a plethora of knitted socks and other winter wear, in addition to candles, pottery, and handmade wooden toys.

Estonia also has an impressive collection of folk music, considered one of the most extensive in the world. Ethnomusicologists from all over come to study its rich collection of traditional songs, many of which are still sung at the Song Festivals year to year. Johann Gottfried Herder, a pastor and teacher in Riga between 1764 and 1769, was an important figure in the preservation and promotion of Estonian folklore.⁹⁹ He believed that folk music “had kept some form of Baltic identity alive even in the absence of a ‘higher’ culture.”¹⁰⁰ Folk songs were often the only pieces of their culture that Estonians could hold onto, and they continue to have an influence today. Additionally, Estonia enthusiastically participates in the Eurovision Song Contest, which it won in 2001.¹⁰¹ Though considered mere popular entertainment rather than

⁹⁸ Gregory Feldman, “Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 414.

⁹⁹ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 113.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 405.

high art, the song contest helps put Estonia on the map for many Europeans and has arguably contributed to tourism.¹⁰²

Song festivals constitute an important part in preserving the tradition of singing for the new generations. Estonia's youth play an active role in the festivals. When the grip of Soviet censorship began to loosen, rock and folk musicians began to compose and perform new music.¹⁰³ A lot of the music written during this time still gets played at song festivals today. Students at Tartu University essentially kicked off the Singing Revolution summer on May 14, 1988, with the Tartu Music Days, where "the nonconformist spirit of rock converged with explicit nationalism and civic disobedience when audience members unfurled two illegal Estonian flags."¹⁰⁴ Students have always played an important role in these festivals.

One current Estonian student of the University of Tartu, Marili Tomingas, has participated in both the youth song festivals and national song festivals since her childhood, in 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2014. A multitude of choirs sings at and participates in the festivals. Composers often write new music that is then performed at the festivals, which occur every four years.¹⁰⁵ This means that a song festival happens every two years, similar to the summer and winter Olympics, with the youth and national song festivals switching off. When asked about the national importance of song festivals, Marili replied that the organizers and conductors always emphasize that they "are not having song festivals for fun; we are continuing

¹⁰² Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 405.

¹⁰³ Guntis Smidchens, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 237.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰⁵ Marili Tomingas, email interview with the author, November 30, 2015.

a tradition that old Estonians started a long time ago, and the song festival's main goal is to unite our feeling of Estonian nationality, to keep it and expand it."¹⁰⁶ Even so, the atmosphere generally tends to be joyous as friends and family members come together to sing new and old songs about their homeland. Marili says, "I am proud for song festivals, as they unite Estonian identity, history, nationality, musical education, society, and most of the population."¹⁰⁷ Many current participants of the festivals remember and lived through the Soviet occupation, so the ability to sing freely is especially emotional. The atmosphere of the festivals is calm and happy despite the large crowds, and everyone actively participates in the singing, especially on the patriotic songs.¹⁰⁸ Considering the small size of Estonia's population compared with other nations, the turnout at these festivals is spectacular.

Estonia's art industry makes it unique, but the country also seeks to connect with larger cultural groups and move away from the stereotypes that come with being an Eastern European country. The Estonian government has made several attempts to rebrand the country as a Nordic or Finno-Ugric nation as opposed to a Baltic or Eastern European one, with varying degrees of success. According to Gregory Feldman, "international ties are crucial to ensure that Estonia remains outside the sphere of Russian influence, which dampens appeals to exclusive nationalism and makes attractive other identities that align Estonia with larger political and cultural groups."¹⁰⁹ One of those larger cultural groups is the Baltic Sea Region, generally

¹⁰⁶ Marili Tomingas, email interview with the author, November 30, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ I observed this during my participation in the Night Song Festival in Tartu in Spring 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 413.

defined as including all the countries that border the Baltic Sea. Small countries like Estonia would benefit greatly from such an association, especially since Northern European countries have a reputation for low levels of international tension and high quality welfare states.¹¹⁰

The Estonians have close ethnic ties to the Finns, and both Estonian and Finnish fall into the Finno-Ugric language category. They sound similar when spoken and have many cognates. A native Finn would have a much easier time learning Estonian than, say, a native English speaker would. Many people who live in the capital city of Tallinn work in Finland, usually Helsinki, where the wages are higher. Estonia also has close ties to Sweden, whose former empire left distinct marks on Estonian culture. Gregory Feldman remarks that Estonians could arguably "credit some of their literary tradition to the school system introduced by the Swedes as well as to the mythological tropes shared with the Finno-Ugrians."¹¹¹ Sweden and Finland have economic interests in Estonia as well as cultural ties. On one hand, Estonia wants to associate itself with the stereotypes of Northern European countries as calm and nonthreatening. On the other hand, Estonia risks effectively becoming a Nordic economic colony, as it does not yet have the capability to match the other Nordic countries in terms of wealth and international prestige.¹¹²

Estonia faces several problems that keep it separate from the other countries of Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Most significant is the gender wage gap. Estonia has the

¹¹⁰ Ole Waever, "Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War," *International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (Jan 1992): 87.

¹¹¹ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 417.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 424.

highest gender wage gap in Europe at 29.9 percent in 2013, while the EU average was 16.3 percent.¹¹³ To compare, Finland's was 18.7 percent and Sweden's was 15.2 percent.¹¹⁴ Nordic countries also pride themselves on their commitment to high environmental standards, whereas Estonia has a long history of questionable environmental practices. The Soviets misused the land for years, and the Estonians had to deal with the consequences. According to David Kirby in *The Baltic World, 1772-1993*, the proverbial "melting of the ice has revealed a terrible mess of environmental pollution and economic chaos, carefully concealed by Soviet leaders and studiously ignored for decades by their Scandinavian counterparts in the interests of preserving the Baltic region from conflict."¹¹⁵ These problems set Estonia apart from its Northern neighbors.

Even if Estonia cannot be fully Nordic, it still has other labels with which to align itself. Many people still lump Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania together as "Baltic States," though like the South Caucasus region, this categorization does not necessarily mean that the countries have significant cultural ties other than their love of singing. In many ways, the idea of a "Baltic identity" is mostly useful to outsiders, especially for NATO's purposes.¹¹⁶ While Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania might be mostly the same as far as geopolitics and security are concerned, their

¹¹³ "The gender pay gap in the European Union," *European commission*, accessed December 1, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/gender_pay_gap/gpg_eu_factsheet_2015_en.pdf

¹¹⁴ "The gender pay gap in the European Union," *European commission*, accessed December 1, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/gender_pay_gap/gpg_eu_factsheet_2015_en.pdf

¹¹⁵ David Kirby, *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (New York: Longman Group, 1995), 438-439.

¹¹⁶ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 422-423.

cultural differences are more pronounced. Despite Estonia's attempts to disassociate with its Soviet past, it still participates in Baltic-interstate institutions and benefits from Baltic region tourism. The relatively cheap prices, abundance of natural beauty and wildlife, and historical Medieval Old Town districts—plus the fact that many citizens speak multiple languages, including English—make the Baltic countries an excellent tourist destination for visitors from all over the world.

Compared with other post-Soviet countries, Estonia is doing remarkably well, not only politically and economically, but also in its attempts to carve out a unique sense of national identity. As one of the wealthiest nations in the Eastern bloc, Estonian citizens enjoy a wide range of opportunities not afforded their post-Soviet cousins. Many people commonly refer to the country as E-stonia because of its tech savvy population and abundance of Wi-Fi even in the countryside. According to Estonia's official tourism website, "rapid Wi-Fi internet connections are available in more than 1,007 public places; in many places that service is free of charge."¹¹⁷ Estonians pay for parking through text, all Estonian schools have internet access, and many students from around the world come to Estonia to study computer science and other aspects of the IT sector.¹¹⁸ As of January 2012, over 90 percent of the Estonian population holds an ID card, which they can use to vote and pay taxes.¹¹⁹ In many ways, Estonia is a remarkable success story that other countries can use as a model for their own societies.

¹¹⁷ "Economy in Numbers," *Estonian Foreign Ministry and Enterprise Estonia*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/economy-a-it/economy-in-numbers.html>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

This success, however, does not mean that Estonia will not face complex and challenging issues in the future. Though Estonia does well economically compared to other post-Soviet countries, it is the sixth poorest in the European Union.¹²⁰ In order to understand the recreation of Estonia's national identity, one must look at the comprehensive picture, which includes domestic and international political, economic, and cultural forces. Gregory Feldman says, "The memory of historic suffering alone does not beget a sense of identity."¹²¹ The Estonians have done a remarkable job of remembering and honoring their past without letting it get in the way of creating a new identity. Their relatively peaceful path to independence, followed by successful political, economic, and social transitions to democracy, shows a lot of promise for their future. As the Estonian economy continues to grow, and as the Estonians continue to successfully pass down their traditions and language, the country will endure as a successful and inspiring part of Europe and the world.

¹²⁰ Richard Martyn-Hemphill, "The migrants that made this mouse roar: Estonia grapples with political fallout from its own refugee crisis," *Politico*, last modified Sept. 2, 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/estonia-migrants-refugees-asylum-eu/>

¹²¹ Gregory Feldman, "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no 4 (2000): 411.

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